

Disintegrating Bodies: The Undoing of the Discourse of War in Palleja's *Diario* (1865–66)

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The War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870), also known as The Paraguayan War (and, in Paraguay, as The Great War), is—although generally overlooked outside of Paraguay—one of the central events in the history of nineteenth-century Latin America. In it, the Brazilian Empire joined its forces with Argentina and Uruguay against Paraguay. The outcome was the utter destruction of the latter, while the victors occupied the country and appropriated significant portions of its land.¹ Francisco Doratioto and

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Luc Capdevila, two historians who have written books on this war in recent years, agree in calling it a “total war.” By this expression, I am referring to a conflict “involving the complete mobilization of a society’s resources to achieve the absolute destruction of an enemy, with all distinction erased between combatants and noncombatants.”²

Moreover, the conflict had a profound impact on the modernization efforts of the participating states.³ The clearest consequence of it was the spectacular militarization of the allied countries in the decades that followed the war.⁴ In Paraguay, where this militarization and modernization of the state apparatus had taken place before the war, the consequences were the complete destruction of the country.⁵ Given the brutality of the conflict, the extraordinary length of time over which it dragged out, and the devastating consequences wreaked on Paraguay, most of the accounts of the war consist of subjective opinion, pamphlets, or the establishment of unique responsibilities to explain the Paraguayan genocide that resulted from it. Most importantly, this war was a traumatic event that transformed forever the Paraguayan ideas of itself and its neighbors. References to the conflict are omnipresent in all narratives of the country’s history, and the event strongly influences—still today—the ways in which culture, politics, the economy, and virtually every aspect of the country are commented and discussed.⁶ Still today, when we have just commemorated the 150th anniversary of the beginning of this other “Great War,” a modern and supposedly modernizing event that transformed Paraguay into a pre-modern country, it remains urgent to remember and rethink this conflict.

In this chapter, I will read the ways in which León de Palleja’s (1817–1866) *Diario de la campaña de las fuerzas aliadas contra el Paraguay* [*Diary of the Allied Forces’ Campaign against Paraguay*] (1865–66), written by a colonel of the Uruguayan army sent to the battlefield of the war, performs a critique of the state apparatus and of its logic of war. The contradictory and profoundly original element of this critique is that it is made from a soldier’s perspective. Focusing on the complexities that constitute Palleja’s writing, as well as on the representations of spaces and of the troop’s movement toward the battlefield, I suggest that both movement and immobility contribute to the destruction of the Uruguayan army. Specifically, through the frequent references to desertion and diseases, I show how the image of the army that this narrative draws is one of disintegration, decomposition, and loneliness. The army, as it approaches the Paraguayan territory, is represented as an

increasingly dismembered and weak body. Thus, the article suggests a connection between the narrative of the Uruguayan forces and the traumatic sufferings of the Paraguayan population. In fact, Palleja's description of the enemy changes as the destruction of his own army becomes increasingly evident, and the reader perceives a better understanding of the Paraguayan sufferings toward the end of this book.⁷

León de Palleja, born in Spain as José de Pons y Ojeda, was a close ally and friend of the Uruguayan president Venancio Flores, who signed the Treatise of the Triple Alliance with Argentina and Brazil in 1865.⁸ Palleja was then sent to the Paraguayan front in command of the "Florida" battalion. He died in Paraguay, at the Battle of Boquerón, on July 18, 1866, when the war was not even close to an end. The participation of Uruguay in the war was widely viewed within the country as a favor that Flores had to pay back to the Brazilian Empire for having helped it topple the Blanco government.⁹ It was largely considered an issue involving the governing Colorado Party, not a national cause.¹⁰ In spite of the small size of the Uruguayan army sent to the front, this was the group that, within the Allied forces, most suffered the war. In fact, it was almost annihilated. Only about ten percent of the Uruguayan soldiers, at the most, survived.¹¹ This point will be central in my reading of Palleja's text, and it is an element of this war that speaks to both the Uruguayan and the Paraguayan experiences. Palleja's voice, in its desperation and anguished cries for help, in its lack of understanding of the surrounding war, in the slow but certain awareness of its own inevitable destruction, of the extermination of its own forces, is closer to the Paraguayan experience than to that of a glorious victor.

Throughout the article, I will refer to some Paraguayan accounts of the war that strike similar tones to that of the diary I study. Thus, I intend to bring closer the experiences of suffering pervasive in both armies. In a way, it is perhaps the Uruguayan perspective the one that—among the allied nations—could better identify itself with the Paraguayan suffering. Both countries were very close to each other before the conflict erupted, and, since then, they have always maintained a marginal role in the political dynamics of the Southern Cone region, being largely ignored and dismissed by the South American powers. Their independence was threatened by Brazil for most of the nineteenth century, and their continued existence has been attributed partly to the maintenance of the political equilibrium in the region. In many ways, both Uruguay and Paraguay were—and still are—islands.

Palleja's *Diary* was published in two volumes (the first in 1865, and the second one posthumously in 1866), and it is composed by the chronicles that Palleja would publish in the Uruguayan newspaper *El pueblo* while he was traveling to the front and, afterward, already in Paraguay. The first volume of the *Diary* narrates the Uruguayan forces' trip to the front of war, while the second one is mostly focused on the events that occurred after the troops entered the Paraguayan territory. The last day to be narrated is July 17, 1866. The author would die in combat one day later, leaving his work unfinished.

PROBLEMATIZING REPRESENTATION: DIARY, WITNESSING, AND DEATH

Palleja's *Diario* is particularly interesting because it constitutes one of the very few accounts of the war in which the narrator adopts a remarkable independence of mind while analyzing the conflict. If, as mentioned above, most narratives of this war—up to the present day—have tended to be clearly one-sided and simplistic, Palleja's writing constitutes an important exception. This article suggests that his *Diario* performs a profound critique of the nationalistic and fanatic discourse of war. His account is devoid of all certainty about the purpose, the logistics, and the strategy of the conflict. He vehemently denounces the abandonment to which the Uruguayan state condemned its own military forces and, more generally, the contradictions of the official discourse of war. His desperate text dramatically expresses the complete futility of war, of which Palleja himself was a victim. Alai Garcia-Diniz affirms: "In the *Diary* of Palleja the routine of war eliminates all "patriotic" clichés and problematizes the subject of the narration in the midst of the conflict's nonsense."¹² It is a discourse of senseless pain and suffering, devoid of all celebration of nationalistic pride. The abrupt silence that interrupts the flow of the narrator's voice at the end of the book constitutes the most eloquent—visual, typographic, sonorous—form of critique of the conflict.

The *Diario*, while considered a valuable and rich historical document, has rarely been approached as literature. One important exception is Sebastián Díaz-Duhalde's recent book, in which he examines the visual elements present in these writings, focusing specifically on the dialogues between literature and photography.¹³ Díaz-Duhalde discusses how the photographic perspective present in the chronicles of Palleja—although no

photographs were included in the *Diario*—would work as an instrument to approach the conflict, which eludes representation.¹⁴ This is connected to Fredric Jameson's idea that war in itself constitutes an event that resists representation.¹⁵ I argue that war—understood as concrete clashes, as the first-hand narration of battles—is not part of Palleja's *Diario*. Palleja's is a noneventful war. Sun Tzu, in his well-known book *The Art of War*, states: "be swift as the thunder that peals before you have a chance to cover your ears, fast as the lightning that flashes before you can blink your eyes."¹⁶ War understood as movement, as action or velocity, is nowhere to be found in Palleja's text. In fact, war becomes its exact opposites: loneliness, immobility, desertion, void, loss, and waste. And, at the end, silence, a deadly silence. The entire 380-page first volume does not narrate *any* concrete clash; on the contrary, it is the narration of a destructive immobility that suggests war as a goal that is never reached.

War represents an impossible narrative frontier also because, when it finally comes and involves the traveler, it means the end of narration. In a way, the silence that closes these chronicles is arguably the most powerful presence of the war. War is most effectively represented as *silence*. The abrupt interruption of the narrator's voice toward the end of the text implies a contradictory operation by which the witness is finally able to *say* through silence. This impossibility to bear witness to traumatic events is addressed by Giorgio Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. This author affirms that what the testimony communicates, what is left of the act of suffering, cannot be a word: "language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness."¹⁷ Agamben explains how, in some experiences of extreme suffering, what remains is "an inarticulate babble or the gasps of a dying man."¹⁸ I suggest that the silence that closes this *Diario* can be read as having the same role as these inarticulate sounds. Agamben concludes that the *superstite*, the witness who underwent an event up to its end and can give testimony of it, speaks on behalf of the true witness, the one who can no longer tell his/her story. I would like to read the final silence of Palleja's text as a form of this impossibility of bearing witness, as that which speaks for the dead author, as a contradictory form by which his voice prolongs itself. In this sense, silence is a trace of language.

This silence can also be considered from the perspective of the diary as a literary form. The abrupt interruption of the narrative voice could in fact be understood as a characteristic of all personal diaries.¹⁹ Palleja's text presents nonetheless some fascinating particularities. Diaries of war,

by definition, do not narrate a life, but a particular circumstance witnessed by an “I” who is immersed in a collective mission and whose personal life is severely limited due to the scarce private spaces and times available at the front, the prohibition of taking personal decisions, the group mentality, the necessary obedience to superior orders, the absence of individual activities, and practically all elements of a soldier’s life. The private and the public are inextricable parts of this genre. In a way, the expression “diary of war” constitutes an oxymoron. It can be said that the more personal a diary of war is, the more it undermines the essence of war and the more it undoes itself. Moreover, this text is being written for immediate publication in a newspaper, an element that further complicates the consideration of the purpose of the writing in this case. For whom, and for what reason, is Palleja writing? Who is the intended reader of this text? Ricardo Piglia has affirmed that “in the origin of a diary there is always a loss, something that the text tries to understand or restore.”²⁰ As I will argue here, loss (more specifically, the Spanish word *pérdida*, which can mean “loss” but also “waste” in English) is actually Palleja’s central obsession. His diary is about the many forms of loss that become more and more painful throughout this narration. The quintessential relation of the diary with death that has been pointed out by critics is present in Palleja’s account with unusual relevance.²¹ It can be said that the imminence of death constitutes this writing’s origin or condition of possibility. If many diaries are written as a form of giving density to time and to life, in this case, the diary is a strategy of survival, a way of clinging oneself urgently—desperately—to life. I will further discuss these different aspects of Palleja’s writing throughout the chapter.

I propose to read these chronicles as travel writing. By adopting this perspective, I intend to focus my analysis on the ways in which space and movement are represented, and on the specific articulations that spatial elements adopt in times of war. As happens in the case of the diary form, the particular voyage represented here problematizes the very notion of travel. To travel toward war implies a different understanding of movement, of the notions of departure, return, home, and destination. In a word, here I will study a rather original conception of travel—and of traveler—different from the most common ways of writing about voyages in the nineteenth century.²² In Palleja’s chronicles, specifically, the gradual destruction of the traveler (i.e., the Uruguayan forces), turns the experience of movement into a narrative of suffering. While the “Florida” battalion traverses different regions advancing toward the battlefields of

Paraguay, it begins to falter, to debilitate, and to decompose. The idea of disintegration becomes thus central for understanding Palleja's travelogue, in two complementary ways: on the one hand, he repeatedly mentions desertion as a growing threat to the corps; on the other hand, Palleja narrates how the weather and different diseases have a destructive effect on the body of the soldier, which becomes rotten, dismembered, and useless. The frequent use of the Spanish word *cuervo*, meaning in English both "corps" and "body," is eloquent here. The *Diario* narrates thus the simultaneous and complementary disintegration of the corps and the body. The decomposition that Palleja is witnessing is of course not just the one affecting the Uruguayan army, but, as I said before, he talks frequently of a "war of extermination" throughout his narrative. In a way, he is aware of the utter decimation of the Paraguayan national body that is taking place while he writes. This is important because the apocalyptic tone of his text, its numerous images of rotten and decomposing bodies, the atmosphere of death and abandonment suggested, acquire universal dimensions that affect the territory, as well as the different armies and nations involved. In this narrative of contagion, everything seems to be irremediably vanishing.

Since I am studying here the ways in which travel and movement operate in the context of war, I will focus my study on the first volume of Palleja's *Diario*, which narrates the events of the year 1865, centered on the trip to the battlefield, although at times I will mention elements of the author's last letters (included in the *Diario's* second volume) that are pertinent to my analysis.

DETOURS, OBSTACLES, ABSENCES: THE WAR BEFORE THE WAR

If—as argued above—war conceived as clashes and as velocity is absent from this narration, it is nonetheless fascinating to study the ways in which the texts tries to approach the conflict without fully representing it. The war will be present as silence, immobility, and as natural obstacles. In Palleja's view, the war begins as soon as the army leaves Montevideo. Already in the very first letters, it is clear that the narrator describes a war against the space, which is the first—and terrible—enemy. Before the Paraguayan army even appears in the horizon, the Uruguayans find a formidable ally of the enemy in the soil they traverse (not even Paraguayan territory in the first volume). This unexpected enemy is what causes prolonged stops and waits that will begin

to destroy the soldiers' bodies and minds. Each letter enumerates a series of obstacles that complicate movement. The unknown space imposes its own rhythm to the travelers. For the invading army, it is not possible to control the speed or the direction of movement: "We began to walk through long swamps and brooks, some of them very deep, which had been made difficult to traverse by the strong rainfall of the previous night and day." Among many quotes similar to the following, we find references to various traps that nature hides:

One can avoid the ant's nests by walking in zigzag; but old ant's nests form a well or a drain which is not visible because it is covered by water; these wells are called *cangrejales*. Sometimes the walking infantryman or cavalryman disappears one or two meters underground and usually needs the help of the next man to escape from the predicament. We already knew the reputation of this *new plague* that comes to afflict us. [emphasis added]

The ant's nests prevent the army from moving in a straight direction, forcing it to move in zigzags. However, other obstacles remain hidden by water and catch the travelers by surprise. The image of the soldier suddenly disappearing into the soil, as if he were being trapped or even eaten by it, represents the difficulties for advancing at the expected speed and prefigures the increasing sufferings that will be narrated in the following letters. There is even a reference to these natural obstacles as a "plague," which also anticipates the many diseases—and the desertion—that will contribute to the battalion's gradual dismemberment. The text is also explicit regarding the ways in which nature slows down the troops' movement: on the same page, the narrator tells us that on that day the group could only make "five *mortal* leagues" when it should have traveled twice that distance if the field had been good (emphasis added). Movement is already synonym with death and suffering: "each day is a real *via crucis*."²³ The notion of feeling pain while moving—of obvious Christian resonances—is also pervasive in some Paraguayan accounts of the war, such as the one by Gaspar Centurión, where we read "I calculated the length of this *via crucis* to be about two leagues."²⁴

Not just the typical elements of the soil—swamps and brooks—represent a problem, but also the weather: the constant rain, extreme heat or unusual cold are impossible to foresee, and the soldiers do not have any protection against them. Weather and space affect movement in manifold ways, and this increasingly takes a toll on the morals and the speed

of the troops. There are references to “a cold water that seemed a hail and snow drizzle,” to the wind that “cuts our faces,” the “excessive cold,” “a great gale which has remained all day,” an exceptionally terrible tempest, rivers that, due to excessive rain, get out of their course and kill twenty-eight men, men who die at night as a consequence of the extreme cold, poor and deserted soil where there is no food or natural resources. The descriptions of this extremely hostile nature remind the reader of apocalyptic scenes: “the most insignificant brook has become a torrent, the most modest streams have become rivers.”²⁵ There is no order or measure in this alien nature; everything is hyperbolic, extreme, and deadly.

One of the main consequences of this permanent struggle with space is immobility: “Another wasted day due to this damned weather that has been chasing us for two months.”²⁶ Strictly speaking, this is not a narration of war, but of paralysis: “everything has remained paralyzed,” “unexpected paralysis.”²⁷ If war is movement, then it is absent from these pages. The Uruguayan army cannot move, and thus the actual clash with the Paraguayan troops is incessantly deferred, the enemy remains impossible to reach.²⁸ Travel and movement disappear, and each announcement of an imminent combat comes to nothing, thus betraying the expectations of both the reader and the narrator. It could be said that Palleja’s *Diario* is an uneventful narration, since we read about a war that does not happen. In fact, *nothing* happens. There are innumerable references to immobility, silence, and the absence of any change in the situation: “the night ended without change,” “nothing of note happens,” “nothing of note happened. The area is still silent. Not a single shot is fired,” “not a single change occurred,” “no changes during the night.”²⁹ These sentences, incessantly repeated with identical structure throughout the two volumes of this account, acquire an almost anaphoric power. They show one of the forms in which this battalion is surrounded by a growing void: the void of action, which is another form of destruction, since the presence of the army in those unknown lands becomes purposeless. This “state of inaction”³⁰ to which the soldiers are condemned by the space (and the state) makes that same space increasingly visible, bringing it to the foreground. When there is no movement, there is only space. At the same time, this very inaction causes hunger, death, and uneasiness.³¹ Immobility constitutes the narrator’s main cause of anxiety: “Our inaction does not have an explanation; nobody understands this mystery that presides over our war operations.”³² This lack of understanding constitutes an eloquent way of expressing the

narrator's powerlessness to decide operations, movements, and strategies. In *Palleja*, war is essentially a discourse of passivity, of a body that does not control its movement, that does not possess itself, and that has no agency. This is a traveler that has no control whatsoever of the rhythm or exact purpose of his trajectory, or about the itinerary of his voyage. This desperate urgency for action proves sadly ironic in the end, since when action finally comes it will bring the narrator's disappearance.

FORMS OF NO RETURN

These first letters are in reality the narration of successive failures and frustrations, because, as we have seen, the destination of the voyage (i.e., the enemy, the concrete battle) cannot be reached. The fact that the destination of a voyage of this kind is not actually a place but an event (which, in this case, can be elusive, invisible, deferred) makes it of course very special. Thus, the destination is conceived in terms of action and time. We travel to *do* something, to take part in some event. However, both time and action are a problem in this narration. Reaching the destination implies, furthermore, the possibility of the traveler's destruction. To travel to war means that the return might not be possible, and this is precisely what happens in the case of *Palleja*. Already in the first pages, there is uncertainty about the narrator's future when he describes the first death in his troops: "one that will not see Montevideo again, which he left only three days ago full of hope... but at least his bones rest in Uruguayan land. Friendly hands dig the grave that holds his remains... who knows where ours will rest?" When the battalion finally leaves Uruguay, *Palleja* shows his awareness of the possibility of not coming back: "we said goodbye from the bottom of our hearts to our beloved Banda Oriental..., happy those who can see it again." The uncertainty with respect to the return to one's own land implies an entirely different conceptualization of the experience of travel. According to Georges Van Den Abbeele, the *oikos*, or home—that point from which one departs and to which one returns—can become unrecognizable, thus making the return impossible: "the home that one leaves is not the same as that to which one returns. The very condition of orientation, the *oikos*, is paradoxically able to provoke the greatest disorientation."³³ The disappearance of the point of return deeply changes the entire experience of travel. There is an additional complication in the case of the travelogue we study here, since it is being narrated from the perspective of one's

own imminent death, from a liminal and radically exceptional circumstance.

These circumstances are of key importance for allowing Palleja to see beyond the limited and simplistic perspective of state-sponsored military violence. This is, undoubtedly, a voyage of no return, but not simply because of the Colonel's death in the battlefields of Paraguay. Most importantly, it is not possible to come back from war because the traveler ceases to identify himself with his *oikos*. By questioning the decisions of his superiors and revealing the absence of the state, as well as the abandonment to which it has condemned its own forces, Palleja is actually undermining the ideological point of departure of his voyage. As the situation becomes critical, the narrator's tone becomes desperate, and writing becomes an imploration for help: "We would much desire that our voice were heard by the Minister of War."³⁴ The *oikos* is no longer a valid reference for the soldier-traveler. It has gone out of sight. The war, from the perspective of Palleja, is an atypical one, a stateless war.³⁵

There is an interesting ambiguity here, because the narrator is explicit in his loyalty to the government (particularly to President Flores) and to his mission, while at the same time he constantly denounces the state's lack of resources, organization, and interest in the war. The clear will to show respect and obedience is implicitly undermined by the detailed description of the critical situation of the army. The narrator struggles to navigate between the military codes of honor, respect, and obedience on the one hand, and the exposure of the premodernity of the Uruguayan army and state, which contradicts the official war-mongering discourse on the other. The narrator seeks to build a personal and critical voice that expresses the "truth" about war. Although he expresses his unwillingness to being involved in long debates, the accusations against his views that appear in the Uruguayan press force him to reflect on his task and the purpose of his writings. Thus, the *Diario* is not just the account of a voyage to war, but also of the construction of an independent voice that escapes the simplifying and fanatic discourse of the military and becomes that of a public intellectual:

*We do not write correspondences, what I write is my personal Diary ... I narrate the plain truth as Colonel Palleja always knows how to say it; otherwise it would be a farce. If my Diary must not be read, let them not publish it; but do not censor it; this is the Liberation army, and not one of despots. As long as the Commander in Chief does not bar me from doing it, I will always narrate the truth that my eyes witness.*³⁶

Here, Palleja makes the private diary become public. The importance of the individual is also highlighted by the grammar of the first sentence: The reference to the war correspondent is in the plural, while the one who writes the personal diary is the “I.” While Palleja condemns the critical views of his account as forms of censorship, he implies that he only writes his opinions and experiences, and that they should not be read as official dispatches. However, by reclaiming his right to disagree and to make critical, unwanted, or unwelcomed remarks, he is undoing the very logic he represents. Thus Palleja, by openly showing reservations about his mission and, above all, exposing his own fragility (and that of the entire battalion), subverts the military discourse that constitutes his education: “How sad is to be a soldier!”

In many occasions, we read about the scenes of writing: they always include obstacles, hardships, suffering, and loneliness. These descriptions are central in the construction of the traveler-writer-intellectual: “this clumsily-written diary, sometimes written when I was sunk in mud, while the wind and the rain were taking the paper away, and even if I pay attention it is stained with mud.”³⁷ Paradoxically, the writing is made possible by the forces’ state of immobility. It is particularly interesting to note that, according to Palleja, certain traces of his fight against the space are inserted in the materiality of the writing. The sheet of paper preserves signs of the muddy scene of writing. The space marks the paper, *writes on it*.

Both the narrator’s auto-construction as a writer and intellectual, and the portrayal of his writing as personal and not official, are part of a subtle rhetoric of disobedience that traverses the text and which is evident when the narrator portrays himself as an example of obedience: “The duty of a soldier imposes silence on me; thus I will simply narrate without adding commentaries.”³⁸ Palleja is a master of the art of saying without saying. The supposed clear-cut distinction between narration (understood as an objective account of events) and commentary (understood as subjective opinion) implied in this quotation is completely absent from his writing, of course. The text is, in fact, a succession of critical statements about the deficient preparation and strategy of the Uruguayan government and army. At the same time, paradoxically, the absence of the state might be the condition of possibility of this writing: he can write *because* there is no state and no displacement. If to be a soldier is to be silent, as Palleja states, then the mere act of writing is already a form of disobedience. And, in its turn, to disobey constitutes, figuratively speaking, another form of no return; the *oikos* ceases to be the voyager’s point of reference.

“DISOLUCIÓN CONTINUA DE LOS CUERPOS:” WAR
AS DISINTEGRATION

Oscar Centurión, a Paraguayan soldier who was part of his country's medical corps, described the decimation of his troops as a form of disintegration: “After passing through Tacuatí, toward Lima-Tuyá, our division began to disintegrate due to the lack of orders and food. We did not know where to go or even which direction to take; the enemy was blocking all the roads and the stragglers that joined us all brought conflicting reports, which sowed panic among our already decimated forces.”³⁹ While the Paraguayan army never loses its pride and always knows the reasons for fighting, this voice is clearly aware of the complete annihilation that the war is bringing upon the soldiers. The mention of the “lack of orders” indicates that, as happens with Palleja, there is a strong uncertainty about how to proceed, where to go, and how to recover from the numerous lost battles.

Palleja adds one important element to this: a significant part of the hardships narrated in his war travelogue deals with the body and its sufferings. The narrator highlights the connections between travel, war, and the body. War brings the body to the foreground. The body can be understood here in two different—though complementary—ways. On the one hand, there is the body of the soldier (of the narrator and the other men who are part of the “Florida” battalion). These bodies are usually the victims of the harsh weather, as we have seen, but also—and as a consequence—of many diseases, such as dysentery, smallpox, measles, and typhus. This is another element that contributes to the Uruguayan forces becoming a void, a desert. The narrator enumerates the different diseases as he painstakingly keeps track, day by day, of the number of dead soldiers caused by them. Palleja narrates death before the actual battle is reached. He even equates diseases to desertion, because some soldiers pretend they are sick in order to avoid exercise and the tiredness it provokes. Needless to say, this contributes to the battalion's scarce mobility.

On the other hand, the entire Florida battalion can be considered as a body (the Spanish military word for a group of soldiers is *cuerpo*, and Palleja uses this word—not accidentally, I believe—continuously, as can be seen in the quote that gives a title to this section). Not just the diseases imply death and destruction, but desertion represents the gradual dismemberment of the military body. A deserter is someone

who transforms his own army into a void; someone who abandons the battlefield, who flees the glorious narration of the victor. He seeks to escape the logic of war and its consequences. The *Diario* is a narration of abandonment, and desertion represents its most pungent form: “we continue to have desertions in our corps. On the 11th we had four, and last night another four; men from Corrientes, Entre Ríos and some Uruguayans among them.”⁴⁰ This problem is a constant source of alarm for Palleja, and it becomes much more serious than the many diseases. It is, in fact, another form of no return. Even if desertion is a destructive force for Palleja and his battalion, I argue that, through the different operations I have outlined in these pages, Palleja himself is undoing the discourse of war. He is using a logic that does not differ in reality from that of those who flee the army. The narrator, in a lucid comparison, calls desertion “the worm that gnaws our body.” The image constitutes a powerful anticipation of death, but it also makes clear the equivalence between the body of the soldier and the battalion considered as a unity. The unstoppable desertion imposes a slow, but inevitable and complete, disintegration to a body that is already dead and, thus, cannot defend itself against destruction. It is interesting that the image of the premature death of a traveling body that was unified at the moment of departure does not imply the absence of suffering and torture. To move forward means debilitation. The army is a zombie-like suffering dead body.

Before the battalion becomes a void in itself, the narrator describes the space as a desert. As discussed above, the space is treacherous, menacing, and it hides traps and obstacles that modify the ways in which the advancing army moves. In addition, however, it is also a void, a ruinous and already destroyed space. Palleja narrates a trip through the desert: “are we really in a desert?” As they move forward, the Uruguayan soldiers find nothing. This isolation, again, implies the absence of food and of any kind of support: “we find the fields more and more destroyed and, thus, our horses are each day weaker.”⁴¹ The battalion becomes a deserted entity in the midst of a desert.⁴² These “deserts” where the army stops are ruinous spaces, where devastation has already happened. It is as if the war had already visited these places. Palleja finds only wastelands where there is nothing but traces of destruction. For example, the Uruguayan forces have to clean the field, “which, due to the *wastes of meat and bones* from the slaughtering of animals, is full of *decomposing* matter which contaminates the air. We have only burned what we

could, and if we stay longer in this *state of inaction* it will be necessary to change fields.”⁴³ This atmosphere of death surrounds the uneasy battalion. It seems that they encounter battlefields, residues of a war, before the war even begins: “Also the entire field’s surface, in a two-league radius, is covered with horses and some oxen that have died of starvation and lack of food. The field is awful and day by day appears more destroyed.”⁴⁴ This description of the space is strongly anticipatory, but at the same time it is a metaphor of the conditions of the Uruguayan soldiers. The description of animals that died of hunger and of the soil that is gradually being destroyed and becomes unproductive is also a reference to the circumstances that the witnesses of that desolation are experiencing. The space contaminates the army, which becomes more and more “swamp-like” and “desert-like,” that is to say, stagnant, foul. The armed body is now an alien to itself, uncanny. Toward the end of the second volume, the battlefield is described as a cemetery, and everything is rotten and corrupted:

The Paso de la Patria is contaminated, only old corrupted air can be breathed there. What can we say about the vast cemetery where we are camping? Here death comes at all times; it is thought of, because tents are mixed with the graves of dead people. If one goes outside, we see the large graves and the still unburied Paraguayan corpses. One could say that this is a mansion where only death can be breathed, the cold, stoic death of martyrdom and resignation.⁴⁵

This is a book that simultaneously tells a story of loss of men and of waste of time (as suggested above, *perder* is an adequate Spanish verb to express both disappearances). Time is continuously wasted because the weather (also expressed with the word *tiempo* in Spanish) is another enemy. We have seen that time is one of the main elements in Palleja’s narration: time related to space, to movement (or lack thereof), to speed, to paralysis, and to expectations and frustrated encounters. Time is a source of desperation and despair for the narrator and his men. It is through time that we see the gradual fall into pieces of the entire battalion.

Time and space are central in the struggle for representation and for bearing witness that Palleja’s text constitutes; I have argued that this is in many ways a narrative of no return; but it also, and above all, narrates an impossible arrival. The arrival narrated is an impossibility, as argued

above, because it means death, silence, and the absence of language. But Palleja is traveling not just toward the growing void of his own army, his own voice, and his own *cuerpo*, but he gradually discovers that he travels toward the desert into which Paraguay is being transformed by the war. This book thus narrates the unspeakable suffering that shapes these newly created deserts, these two simultaneous products of war.

NOTES

1. Luc Capdevila claims that "Brazilian troops occupied Asunción until 1876, and Argentine troops waited till 1878 to evacuate the Villa-Hayes region in the Chaco. The country was in shambles. It had lost 40% of its original territory and 60% of its inhabitants. Its adult male population had been decimated, and its economy devastated." Luc Capdevila, *Une guerre totale. Paraguay 1864–1870* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 34–35. Unless otherwise stated, throughout this chapter all translations are my own.
2. David A Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2008), 7. Capdevila uses this expression in the very title of his book, and affirms that the Paraguayan War was "one of the first modern total wars." Capdevila, *Guerre totale*, 11. And he adds: "here, the focus is put in the dynamics of the clashes, as well as on the mechanisms of mobilization of the entire society which resulted in the disappearance of more than half of the inhabitants of Paraguay, and more than 80% of the masculine population in arms" (11). Doratioto refers to the Paraguayan War as the "second total war," immediately following the American Civil War (1860–1865). Francisco Doratioto, *Maldita guerra: nova história da Guerra do Paraguai* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002), 477. For Capdevila, "total war" largely means war of extermination. Also Palleja, the author I study in these pages, referred repeatedly to this war as one of extermination. León de Palleja, *Diario de la campaña de las fuerzas aliadas contra el Paraguay* (Montevideo: Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social, 1960), volume II, 267, 280, 290, 325. When I quote from Palleja several times in the same line or in consecutive lines, I have opted, for the sake of readability, to mention all the pages when the last quotation appears.
3. Doratioto, *Maldita guerra*, 23. See also Thomas Whigham, *The Paraguayan War. Volume I. Causes and Early Conduct* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 48–73; and Milda Rivarola, "La Guerra Grande y los Estados-nacionales del Plata," in *Más*

allá de la guerra. Aportes para el debate contemporáneo. Herib Caballero et al. (Asunción: Secretaría Nacional de Cultura, 2016), 21–26.

4. With respect to the consequences of the war in Brazil, see, among many possible sources, Doratioto, *Maldita guerra*, 472–485. For Argentina, see Oscar Oszlak, *La formación del Estado argentino: orden, progreso y organización nacional* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1997), 177. However, the involvement of Uruguay—by far the smallest country among the allies—was much more limited. See Juan Manuel Casal, “Uruguay and the Paraguayan War. The Military Dimension,” in *I Die with My Country. Perspectives on the Paraguayan War, 1864–1870*, ed. Hendrik Kraay et al. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 138.
5. Whigham, *Paraguayan War*, 68–72.
6. “The echo of the War has transcended generations to today, and has reunited the inhabitants of the Republic in a community of meaning. The War would have founded the new Paraguay, that which its inhabitants are.” Capdevila, *Guerre totale*, 10.
7. In the first pages Palleja calls the Paraguayan army “stupid and animal,” and, while racializing them by dismissively identifying them with the Pampas Indians, states that “indolence and stupidity” are the main characteristics of Paraguayans. León de Palleja, *Diario de la campaña de las fuerzas aliadas contra el Paraguay* (Montevideo: Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social, 1960), volume I, 85. However, he will later add, admiringly, that Paraguayans are the “most frugal and suffering [people] in the world” (152), and that Paraguayans had been “in the past, enemies, today, brothers. Besides, I confess, I have sympathy for Paraguay” (186).
8. The biographical information about Palleja comes from the second edition (1960) of the book (a volume of the “Colección de Clásicos Uruguayos”—“Collection of Uruguayan Classics,” seemingly an interesting—and clearly unsuccessful—operation of canonization). The *Diario* was published for the third time in 1984, the last year of the military dictatorship, by the Military Circle of Uruguay. This publication constitutes an interesting operation of appropriation of Palleja. The inclusion of this author within a possible group of glorious military writers celebrated by the dictators implies the erasure of Palleja’s critical opinions directed at the state and the military. My argument in these pages goes precisely against these kind of implicit misreadings of Palleja.
9. On the events in Uruguay that triggered the war, see Casal, “Uruguay and the Paraguayan War.”
10. Casal, “Uruguay and the Paraguayan War,” 119.
11. The difference among the figures given by historians is striking. For example, Juan Manuel Casal says that the army was composed by

- “1500 soldiers, of whom only 150 survived.” Casal, “Uruguay and the Paraguayan War,” 119. But Doratioto affirms that Uruguay sent 5500 soldiers, of whom 500 survived. Doratioto, *Maldita guerra*, 483. One of the most lucid witnesses of the war, Richard Burton, wrote in 1870: “As for the «Oriental» army, I failed to find it. The force commenced under General Flores with 5600 men, and he handled it so recklessly that 600 were sent home, and 4600 were killed or became unfit to serve. The remnant of 300–400 is further reduced by some authorities to forty or fifty.” Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Letters from the Battle Fields of Paraguay* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1870), 326. There seems not to be any doubt about the complete destruction of the Uruguayan forces in this War. László Erdélyi affirmed that the Battle of Boquerón, where Palleja died, meant the complete annihilation of the Uruguayan forces. László Erdélyi, “El presente de esa guerra maldita,” *El País Cultural*, May 12, 2014, 3.
12. Alai Garcia-Diniz, “Máquinas, corpos, cartas: imaginários da Guerra do Paraguai” (Ph.D. dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 1997), 57.
 13. Sebastián Díaz-Duhalde. *La última guerra. Cultura visual de la Guerra contra Paraguay* (Barcelona: Sans soleil, 2015), chapter 2. See also his article “Cámara bélica: escritura e imágenes fotográficas en las crónicas del Coronel Palleja durante la Guerra contra Paraguay,” in *Entre el humo y la niebla. Guerra y cultura en América Latina*, eds. Felipe Martínez-Pinzón and Javier Uriarte (Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Pittsburgh, 2016), 55–76.
 14. Díaz-Duhalde, *Última guerra*, 138.
 15. Fredric Jameson, “War and Representation,” *PMLA* 124 (2009):1533.
 16. Sun Tzu, *The art of war*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 23. Paul Virilio has studied the forms that war adopts in the contemporary world from the perspective of velocity. This is for him a basic connection: “War has always been a worksite of movement, a speed-factory.” Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), 141.
 17. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, transl. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 39.
 18. Agamben, *Remnants*, 37.
 19. I thank my colleague Joseph M. Pierce for helping me think through the intricacies of the diary as literary form.
 20. Ana Inés Larre Borges and Ignacio Bajter, “«En el origen del diario siempre hay una pérdida» Diálogo inacabado con Ricardo Piglia,” *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional* 4–5 (2011): 121.
 21. Ana Inés Larre Borges has showed how, in one way or the other, death is usually an essential part of the writing of diaries: “The diary that is written in order to oppose the life’s brevity originates in the awareness of

- death. It finds—as does man himself—its meaning in death.” Ana Inés Larre Borges, “Escrituras del yo, razones para una revista,” *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional* 4–5 (2011), 16.
22. On the necessity of opening up the very notion of “travel” to include diverse experiences (races, genders, social classes) see James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 31–4.
 23. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 53. The three previous quotes by Palleja that appear in this section correspond to page 52 of this same volume.
 24. Gaspar Centurión, “Memories of the Paraguayan War,” in *The Paraguay Reader. History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Peter Lambert et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 100.
 25. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 79. The previous quotations from Palleja in this paragraph correspond respectively to pages 99, 99, 99, 113, 77, 66, 101, and 99.
 26. This is only one quote among many possible ones. I will discuss this rhetoric of waste (and loss), key in my reading of Palleja’s *Diario*, in the last section of this chapter.
 27. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 112. The previous quotes in this paragraph come from pages 87 and 99 of the same volume.
 28. An additional reason for this is that the Paraguayans avoid facing the allies: “the enemy ... tries to avoid the clash with the Oriental army.” Palleja, *Diario*, I, 68. The Paraguayan forces adopt a nomadic logic that implies the abandonment of the battlefield and seeks to avoid the actual clashes. The war testimony of the Paraguayan soldier Leandro Pineda shows the adoption of a strategy that avoids traditional clashes and organized warfare: “We continued our work mainly in guerrilla operations and ambushes.” Leandro Pineda, “A chronicle of war,” in *The Paraguay Reader. History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Peter Lambert et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 93.
 29. The same continues to happen in the second volume, in which supposedly there should be actual battles: the sentence “The night passed without novelty” is repeated every single day. The lack of action is debilitating for Palleja and his army, and a source of anguish for the narrator. This oxymoronic repetition of the uneventful constitutes an effective way of expressing the desperation caused by immobility and the absurdity of war.
 30. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 120. The previous quotes from Palleja come from pages 115, 117, 112, 104, and 121 of the same volume.
 31. Hunger deeply affected also the Paraguayan army, as Leandro Pineda’s account shows: “Many of us starved to death. We were forced to eat our leather whips and cartridge belts, as well as Colonel Martínez’s lame horse.” Pineda, “A Chronicle,” 94.

32. Palleja, *Diario*, II, 273.
33. Georges van den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor. From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), XIX.
34. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 114. The previous quotes from Palleja in this section come from pages 12, 60, and 200.
35. I am alluding here to Charles Tilly's well-known article "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime" in which he famously stated that war and the state are interdependent. Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Violence: A Reader*, ed. Catherine Besteman (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 37. Palleja shows that the Uruguayan state was not really involved in the Paraguayan War. Thus, the state is not only killing its own soldiers, but acting against its very nature, revealing its own precariousness, its own non-statehood.
36. Emphasis added.
37. The repetitive style of Palleja, which bears many traces of orality, does not always follow grammar rules.
38. Palleja, *Diario*, II, 309. Here there is another good example: "Without intending to dare to criticize my superiors, I am convinced that the Argentine army lost today a favorable occasion to get covered with glory." Palleja, *Diario*, II, 379. The previous quotes from Palleja come from pages 21, 79, 47, 69, 21, and 133 of the first volume of the *Diario*.
39. Centurión, "Memoirs," 102.
40. Another eloquent example is the following: "The corps counts already twenty-one losses since it stepped in the land of Concordia; nineteen deserters and two dead."
41. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 80. The previous quotes from Palleja come from pages 17, 120, 120, 14, 78, 63, 71, and 21 of the same volume.
42. It is important to remember here the closeness between the words "desert" and "deserter." Both words' root in Latin are *sero* and its derivative *desero*. The Spanish term *desertor* must have originated from the latter word, though it probably arrived in Spanish through the French *désertier*. Joan Corominas, *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana* (Madrid: Gredos, 1967), 208.
43. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 120, emphasis added. See another strikingly similar example: "the wastes of meat, the bones resulting from the slaughtering of animals, the dead animals and the fresh and shallow graves of our men who died in the last few days and the places of the bodies, all that mass corrupted by the strong heats, have formed a pestiferous and repugnant atmosphere that circulates throughout the camp, and, mostly at night, it is not possible to traverse it [the camp] due to the foul smell it [the camp] releases." Palleja, *Diario*, I, 241.
44. Palleja, *Diario*, I, 120.
45. Palleja, *Diario*, II, 331.

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