

**Ruptured Narratives: Tracing Defeat in Diego Duque de Estrada's
*Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo (1614-1645)***

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Peace is a mess. It takes a war to put things in order.
(Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*)

Nothing is deeper in man than his skin.
(Paul Valéry, *The Fixed Idea*)

1. The War's Underbelly

Military memoirs have traditionally occupied an ambivalent place for their readers; while for some they were too resentful to be taken seriously, and too roguish (*picarescas*) to be read as a reliable testimony, for others they succeeded at offering a faithful glimpse of life on the battlefield, neatly capturing the courage and loyalty of the early modern Spanish soldier.¹ This ambivalence has had a noticeable impact on their transmission and on their presence in the literary canon(s), as if scholars and editors didn't quite know what to do with them. Judging by the existing histories of literature, these recollections have been considered neither strictly fictional, nor realistic enough to be deemed historical narrations. With their frequent disregard for dignity and decorum, they have been relegated to second-tier status, sadly forgotten in the shelves of a paradoxical in-betweenness: too 'fabulous' to be true, too truthful to be fictional. As a result, few of these texts have until now circulated in modern, reliable editions accompanied by a serious and thorough critical apparatus.

Fortunately, our understanding of early modern warfare is different today than what it was three decades ago. Instead of privileging great events in the form of treasons, sieges and battles, the work of scholars like I. A. A. Thompson, Geoffrey Parker, Luis Antonio Ribot García and Jonathan Israel, among others, has focused on the daily conditions of life during wartime, providing fresh insights into phenomena such as the processes of recruitment, the risks of mutiny and desertion, the role of chaplains, barbers, and prostitutes on the battlefield, the financial incentives for the

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¹ See José Almirante, who launched a tradition of studies in Spain frequently coupled with nationalistic overtones, like those of José María de Cossío and Manuel Serrano y Sanz. At the other end of the spectrum, I. A. A. Thompson offered a much-needed revisionist approach to the topic coinciding with the death of General Franco in Spain (1975). For a useful survey of Spanish military history, see VV. AA.; Enrique García Hernán and Davide Maffi.

troops, and the challenges of providing medical care to wounded soldiers.² The *lives* of early modern mercenaries have allowed scholars like Antonio Espino López, Fernando Martínez Laínez and José María Sánchez de Toca to gather important data on the conceptual sophistication of the existing 16th and 17th-century military treatises, as well as on the advanced technical expertise of the famous infantry *tercios* or regiments created by Charles V in 1534.³ These approaches have highlighted the difference between the questionable strategies of the commanders –like the frequent blunders of the Spanish aristocracy in Italy– and the many assets of those who constituted their battalions. Much like the complete set of toy soldiers that a young Philip IV received as a gift from the designer Alberto Struzzi in 1614 –a set that significantly opens Geoffrey Parker’s masterful *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road (1567-1659)*– the Spanish army was a surprisingly diverse assemblage of human capital.

It is only now that we are starting to better appreciate such complexities and their impact on those who set out to write their memoirs at the end of their careers. If luck and talent gave some Spanish soldiers a chance at reintegration into civil society, for many others the return home was as bitter as the war itself.⁴ The war veteran joined the waves of immigrants that triggered the demographic growth of Spain’s major cities between 1550 and 1650, and later suffered from the same stigma as other social outcasts like witches, gypsies, and lepers. Although some returnees enjoyed a certain level of success in their civil makeovers, many others ended up as beggars, if they were not populating the wards built for the handicapped. Consider, for example, the most important short story of the period written by the best-known war veteran in Spanish literature: Miguel de Cervantes’ *The Deceitful Marriage and The Colloquy of the Dogs* (*El casamiento engañoso y El coloquio de los perros*), which starts with the lieutenant Campuzano recovering from syphilis at the infamous Hospital de la Resurrección in Valladolid, has for centuries been a painful reminder of the moral and financial burdens of these unproductive citizens.

Early modern Spanish fiction offers, indeed, a treasure-trove of images and plots dealing with the fate of the returning soldier.⁵ By focusing my attention on Europe

² See Thompson; Geoffrey Parker 2004; Jonathan I. Israel; Luis Antonio Ribot García. One of the best studies of the last decade is Fernando González de León’s 2009 comprehensive account.

³ See Antonio Espino López; Fernando Martínez Laínez and José María Sánchez de Toca. For a general overview of the famous *tercios*, see René Quatrefages; on the topic of fortifications and artillery, see, for instance, Geoffrey Parker 2002, 126-251.

⁴ In some cases, like in the twelve-year truce with the Dutch ‘rebels’ in 1609, the war veteran reinvented himself in a foreign land or joined other armies as a mercenary. Plays like Lope de Vega’s *El asalto de Maastrique* (*The Siege of Maastricht*) and Calderón de la Barca’s *El sitio de Breda* (*The Siege of Breda*) depict the different social origins and nationalities of the soldiers fighting under Generals Farnese and Spinola respectively; on the topic of war in early modern Spanish theater, see David García Hernán.

⁵ The three most frequent rewritings of this figure in genres like the novel and theater are predominantly urban; the soldier-courtier (*soldado gentilhombre*), the entrepreneur –like those who managed royally sanctioned gambling houses– and the *miles gloriosus* as social commentator have been thoroughly studied in recent decades by literary and cultural scholars. For an excellent survey of the *soldado*

–for the overseas colonies pose a different set of questions– I would like to rethink and complicate previous analyses of the topic by revisiting what I consider the most comprehensive narration written by a Spanish mercenary, Diego Duque de Estrada’s *Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo. Prueba de todos estados, y elección del mejor de ellos* (1614-45). Estrada’s is a pivotal text as both personal testimony and historical record; on the one hand, it epitomized a type of first-person account that not only worked effectively as self-propaganda and social denunciation, but also helped to better deal with the traumas of loss and despair;⁶ on the other hand, it argued that writing about war was no longer a matter of glorifying the nation, as the early modern Spanish mercenary tried to find a balance between patriotism and the temptation to blame the Crown for its overambitious enterprises.⁷ Duque de Estrada’s life (1589/93?-1649) ran parallel to Spain’s internal demise, intensified in the European arena by the loss of the Dutch provinces, the rise of France as the new Continental superpower, the increasing hegemony of England and Holland in the maritime routes to the Atlantic and the Pacific, and the secession of Portugal and other minor territories in central Europe. And yet, the existing bibliography on his memoir –extremely attentive to situating these powers in their right context– has been limited by concerns about the credibility of his personal experience, given that some of his soldierly missions appear to be grossly exaggerated.⁸ But the real question is not whether his writing depicts biographical events with fairness and accuracy, but rather how it reflects a number of anxieties that beg for a more nuanced interpretation of the figure of the imperial soldier: how, for example, did these military enterprises open the door to financial gain and social distinction? How did they lead, conversely, to ‘deviant’ sexual behaviors in the unsupervised life on the battlefield and in military prisons? How did the mercenary experience war as a gateway to cultural and religious cross-pollination? A quick look at Estrada reveals that these questions are as defining to them all as they still remain unanswered.

I argue in this essay that these specific concerns determine Duque de Estrada’s mercenary missions as well as his relations with key players of the military arena. As the storyline progresses, they slowly shape a two-front battle in which his soldierly experience and his authorial voice are both determined by a continuous personal re-

gentilhombre, see Raffaele Puddu; on the figure of the war veteran in the form of *miles gloriosus* as treated, for instance, in Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo’s *La lonja de San Felipe*, see Enrique García Santo-Tomás 86-88.

⁶ See Henry Ettinghausen 1990, as well as the introductory pages of his critical edition of the text. All the textual passages quoted in the essay come from this edition.

⁷ For a survey of some of these major battles, see John Elliott 2002, 249-386; Henry Kamen, chapters 3-4; José Alcalá-Zamora. On the sense of divine Providence felt by the Spanish soldier –in relation, for instance, to Estrada’s frequent bouts of religious fanaticism– see Benedetto Croce 1947, 357.

⁸ For an assessment of the veracity of some of the author’s life events, see Otis Green; Benedetto Croce 1933. On Duque de Estrada’s date of birth, along with the veracity of some of his early biographical episodes, see Cossío XVI-XX, XXV-XXVI. In his *Introducción crítica*, Ettinghausen identifies some important chronological inconsistencies in the order of the events narrated (11-12).

mapping. By continuously flirting with death, Estrada devises his memoir not so much as a tribute to the Renaissance ideal of the poet-soldier but rather as a testament to his own survival, to his ability to succeed in foreign lands as new alliances are formed and new causes are defended. For most of the narrative, he presents himself as a mercenary, a *soldado de fortuna* who rewrites his adventures at different moments of his life rather than in one retrospective attempt. But when he concludes the last section of *Comentarios* as a freshly-ordained priest that rejects physical violence in favor of diplomatic skills, the resulting *desengaño* of its title acquires a new dimension by displacing the traditional meaning of disenchantment to an active notion of *awakening*—a new, better calibrated worldview that entails mending past mistakes as well as finding new ways to discipline and preserve one's body. This richly-packed autobiographical feature not only serves a didactic purpose, but ultimately exposes the ties between identity and genre by overcoming a continual threat of effacement, as the traditional assets of the soldier (courage, strength, loyalty) are joined to his narrative voice (undisputed, uninterrupted, unquestioned). I thus read Estrada's writing as a continuous struggle against the physical and narrative fragmentation imposed by the unpredictability of war, for I believe it is the balance of these opposing energies—a vanishing author in front of the sweeping force of History—that makes his memoir so compelling for the modern scholar. This dual struggle not only reflects a life lived at the verge of implosion, but also mirrors the fortunes of an empire on a downhill slope. As a result, his memoir offers today's reader fresh insights into Spain's standing in early modern Europe.⁹

2. The Length of the Battle: Estrada's genre

Diego Duque de Estrada's life is a long concatenation of misadventures—over five hundred pages in its two modern editions.¹⁰ Son of a soldier of rank, he is left an orphan from an early age, is raised by a cousin, and is later betrothed to his cousin's daughter. At nineteen he enlists in the army of the Marquis of Santa Cruz in Madrid, where he also participates in literary academies and writes comedies for the playhouses. One night he returns unannounced to his hometown of Toledo, and when he attempts to furtively visit his lady, he finds an intruder in her bedroom, killing both of them. After a brief sojourn in the shores of Ceuta, Tunisia and parts of Andalusia, he is finally arrested, brought back to Toledo, and brutally tortured in order to confess his crimes and his most recent whereabouts. He is taken to the scaffold, but is pardoned at the last minute and is sent to prison for life, from where he escapes by the intervention of friends and by the help of a nun in a religious house which faced the

⁹ For a comprehensive assessment of Spain's standing in Europe, see Jocelyn N. Hillgarth; for its self-perception during Estrada's time, see John H. Elliott 1997.

¹⁰ Motivated by the phenomenal success of the best-selling Spanish writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte and his novels on *Captain Alatriste*—featuring sporadic appearances by Diego Duque de Estrada—, an early twenty-century edition of the text has been reissued recently (2006).

prison –a nun, Estrada is quick to remind us, who was madly in love with him. After a number of social violations and misdemeanors against the existing code of honor, he is able to reach Naples via Barcelona, where he enters the service of the Spanish Viceroy, Duke of Osuna, beginning one of the most fascinating military careers ever recorded.

Throughout the twenty books composed in different stages of Estrada's life as a mercenary,¹¹ the storyline presents materials in an almost oscillatory movement of stasis and action. The narration is slowed down by the portrayal of historical figures of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48): the Swedish King Gustav Adolph the Great (1594-1632), the commander of the Bavarian and Imperial armies Johann Tzerclaes, Count of Tilly (1559-1632, whose death is mourned in Brecht's *Mother Courage*), the Austrian general Albrecht Wenzel Eusebius von Wallenstein (1560?-1634), and his archrival the Spanish general Baltasar de Marradas (1583-1638); of key figures of the Spanish ruling circles such as Gaspar de Guzmán (1587-1645, future Count-Duke of Olivares), and Philip III's daughter, Princess Mary Anne (1606-46); and even of two Popes of great relevance to Spanish interests: Gregory XV (Alessandro Ludovisi, 1554-1623; reigned 1621-23), known for his involvement in the 1622 canonization of Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, and Isidore; and the anti-Spanish, pro-French Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini, 1568-1644; reigned 1623-44). In turn, the book encompasses a lifetime of skirmishes that always end violently. Estrada's experiences in the European battlefield combine the quick action of battles with the duels he starts and concludes victoriously. He claims to have participated in the ill-fated Venetian Conspiracy (1618; 1619 in his recollection) as one of the disguised Spanish soldiers who were sent into the town to destroy the famous arsenal. He travels around Italy, is shipwrecked in Macedonia, fights the Turks in the Mediterranean, and gets involved in a number of skirmishes in Hungary, Austria, Bohemia and Germany, as well as in parts of what are today Serbia, Croatia and Rumania –living for two years in Transylvania under the Calvinist Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1580-1629). He praises Rome, Florence, Naples, and Pisa as some of the most beautiful cities in the world, visits Milan, Mantua, Messina, Venice, Vienna, and Budapest, and lives some of his most memorable days in Prague. He is, by his own account, one of Europe's most famous courtier-soldiers, prosperous and well-connected, and elder statesman of the diplomatic arena. By then, however, his written recollection has reached a narrative dead-end in the form of a double weakening: the excessive number of wounds on his body has undermined his credibility when it could have become, had he been more modest, a true badge of honor. Estrada thus understands that in order for his voice to recapture the necessary authority in the time he has left, he must replace the intoxication of fame and fortune with the humility of a religious retreat. Having fought

¹¹ These memoirs were transmitted in three different autographs; little else is known about the process of creation, circulation, and recipients of the text. For a reconstruction of the different stages in which it was composed, see Alessandro Cassol 2000, 195.

in countless battles, and with his physical capabilities heavily diminished, he enters in 1635 the Order of San Juan de Dios, beginning a new career that combines religious duties with civil administration. There is not a great deal of tranquility, however, in his later days, for he remains a man of action until the very end: the last three books of his memoir chronicle his life in Sardinia, where he masterminds the defense of the Island against his archrivals, the French.

These last episodes wrap up his convoluted recollection, whose final aftertaste is a bitter one: his life has been, by his own account, “acelerada vida e inquieta, fatigosa y desperdiciada” [fearless, restless, tiresome, wasted life], a true “retablo de desdichas” [theater of misdeeds] (116).¹² In his particular *captatio benevolentiae*, the red tones of the spilled blood share center stage with the black shades of his misfortunes, of his “negra colada” [black laundry] (123), as he sadly terms the potpourri of chaotic events suffered because of his “dark honor,” or “negra honrilla” (231). However, it is not the text’s lack of didacticism that has made it so difficult to classify and integrate into any kind of textual canon, but rather, I would argue, its generic complexity.¹³ Unlike the cohesive nature of terms like *Historia* and *Vida* that appear in some of his peers’ memoirs, the word *Comentarios* allows him large degrees of freedom. His book is, indeed, a combination of a picaresque narrative, of the typical *hoja de servicios* (activities report, not uncommon in the military), of a travel diary, of a number of small biographies and panegyrics, of a history treatise, of a *relación de sucesos*, and even of a series of annals, according to the title of the very last chapter (*Discurso de la vida del autor por anales, en suma*). The narrative voice perfectly adjusts to this narrative journey, as it retells his travails with harmless arrogance, with anguished bouts of self-criticism, even with a healthy dose of corrosive sarcasm when needed.

It is precisely the survival of this voice that constitutes the first of the two battlefields –narrative and ontological– that are at stake in his project. Estrada’s memoir evolves from a picaresque *caso* into an attempt to construct a type of official historiography where his voice is frequently buried by the sheer weight of the events presented. Much like the young rogues of the Spanish picaresque –Lázaro, Mateo Alemán’s Guzmán, Miguel de Cervantes’ Rinconete and Cortadillo– Estrada begins his literary life by drawing from a defining autobiographical source, that is, the description of his lineage and the praise to its most salient figures. In his genealogy, he traces his origins back to the very foundation of Spain, citing a number of key historical figures intimately tied to his ancestry: Rodrigo, Don Pelayo, Doña Urraca, and Cardinal Cisneros legitimate his narrative voice and guarantee his untainted blood. His beginnings are thus optimal –when he gets engaged, for example, he indicates that his dowry is a healthy twenty-thousand ducats– but life’s events turn him into a diametrically different person: “me ensoberbecí de tal manera que vine a ser

¹² All translations into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

¹³ For an interesting discussion of the *Comentarios* as a literary text, see Matías Barchino Pérez; more generally, Jean Molino; Frédéric Briot; Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Talens; James S. Amelang.

insufrible, y no se me decía una palabra que no se volvía en duelo” [I became so arrogant that I was insufferable, to the point that I could challenge anybody to a duel at the slightest provocation] (135). Betrayed by his swagger, he is wounded on numerous occasions: when traveling in Seville he is brutally hit in the head; he receives large gashes around his eyes and hands in the commercial post of Antequera. During his journeys in Italy, he is shot in the thigh and chest, and for three days almost bleeds to death from wounds to the stomach; he is also whacked in his lower back repeatedly, to the point of being permanently scarred, for “jamás enteramente he tornado a sanar” [I have not been able to heal completely]. He is always stumbling upon Death (“tropezando siempre en la muerte”) but is also saved by Providence on numerous occasions, as when, while bleeding profusely in the scaffold at the beginning of his story, he manages to overcome his ‘martyrdom’ by yelling to his executioner, “¡Tirano judío!” [Tyrant Jew!] (128-29).¹⁴

This unusual *captatio benevolentiae* has important consequences for the development of *Comentarios*: as Steven Connor has persuasively argued in his reflection on skin as both a thinking organ and a form of thought, types of torture where skin is ruptured ultimately offer a chance at renewal for the sufferer –to inflict systematic pain is, after all, to rehearse death.¹⁵ Estrada’s universe of bodily trauma, his experience of pain as a sacrificial gauntlet, bears its own regenerative seeds when the skin is subjected to the letter of the law. However, like in most picaresque narratives, his rebirth traces a circular, and not a linear progression, one which eventually leads to recurrent failure. As a strong believer in the turns and twists of Fortune, and despite the deceiving prestige of his last name *Duque*, Don Diego soon accepts his status of a second-tier aristocrat stripped of his family allowance, living at the verge of poverty and committing one misdemeanor after another. The discipline offered by the military, we are led to believe, is what redeems him, as he sets out to serve a nation that ironically has given him nothing but scorn. I would thus argue that by displacing the center of the story to a new topography, this transfer of values becomes a narrative gain as well as a personal loss.

As entertaining as these initial episodes are, they provide very little novelty to the development of the *novela picaresca* and the *novela cortesana* of the time, which achieve finer results in other authors like Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, María de Zayas, Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo, and even Lope de Vega.¹⁶ However, it is

¹⁴ Encarnación Juárez Almendros (182) has identified a number of features of this Christ-like model that highlights his unjustified prosecution as well as his personal valor (“modelo cristológico que exalta su inocente persecución así como su valor personal”). Biblical resonances can be traced to Galatians 6:17, in which Paul declares “From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus.”

¹⁵ See, in particular, Steven Connor 32-33. On the relation between torture and language –and in particular the victim’s voice– see the first two chapters of Elaine Scarry’s influential study; on the relation between pain and shame –regarding, specifically, the symbolic weight of blood in early modern culture– see Gail Kern Paster.

¹⁶ All these episodes of his youth are pure fiction according to Croce 1947, who defines them as a

the new contact zones he experiences after his departure from Spain that represent the most original features of his memoir, both as vital testimonies and as historical records. Nowhere is this more compelling than in the pages devoted to Naples: upon arriving in Italy's *città partenopea*, Estrada sets out to be a *soldato gentilhuomo*, but in this first reincarnation his personal battle immediately splits into a two-pronged one, for he must excel in the use of the sword as much as in certain activities that constitute the bread and butter of Naples' court society: as an *Imperii translator*, he is frequently invited to private parties and to the houses of the colonial upper class by noblemen who are dutifully praised in all their magnanimity; as a cultural mediator between two of Europe's most vibrant metropolises –Madrid and Naples– he remains in total control of his story, placing himself at its very core and surrounding his persona with all the ingredients of a *novela cortesana*, such as music, parties, love, and political intrigues. Even the narration of his marriage is embellished with a number of elements –rivalries among suitors, hidden encounters, etc.– that could very well be found in any short story of the time with a sophisticated, bourgeois reader in mind.

As a result of these new geographical displacements, the narration incorporates new stylistic forms. If Spain had been the space of the rogue, Italy becomes a long military parade where Estrada turns his uprooted-ness into an asset, as he is free to reinvent himself in both his personal history and his personal story. Heavily influenced by the military treatises of the previous century, Don Diego examines all the monumental sites he visits through military eyes, symbolically subjugating the contents of these new territories to a kind of personal travelogue to be enjoyed by his readers. But instead of sharing with them his sense of wonder at the marvels of the Italian Renaissance –which, we are told, he leaves for his poetic compositions– his perception indicates that shapes and sizes are no longer distinctive properties about the work of art, but rather simple measurements at the service of war. The three urban features that he finds most appealing in his journeys are the capacity to hold troops, the strength of walls to defend their citizens, and the existence of specific campgrounds to levy, muster and train men. Such is the case, for instance, of Livorno's fortresses –that he praises for their majesty– and of the town's Cathedral, which makes him calculate how many soldiers he could fit inside: “ella es capaz de meter en orden tres mil hombres armados en escuadrón” [it is capable of fitting a battalion of three thousand armed men] (176). A similar visual experience is that of Milan: whereas its famous Duomo receives a two-line mention, the imposing Castello Sforzesco triggers a lengthy complement on its *trace italienne*,¹⁷ and specifically on its invulnerable twelve-pointed stellar wall system built during the Spanish domination on the initiative of Captain Don Ferrante Gonzaga:

“romanzo o la trama d'una commedia” (350).

¹⁷ On the admiration Spanish soldiers felt for this style of fortification based on short, thick walls surrounded by ample moats, see García Hernán 94-95.

su fortísimo y excelente castillo, raro entre los de Europa por la grandeza de su sitio y fortaleza del puesto [...] por sus fosos llenos de agua, murallas dobles, máquinas y cantidad de graciosísima artillería, alojamiento de setecientos soldados comodísimamente, plaza de armas capaz de un escuadrón de tres mil hombres. (288)

[its strong and unique castle, rare amongst those in Europe because of its foundation and strength [...] because of its moats filled with water, its double walls with their large amount of ingenious machinery and space for seven hundred soldiers, along with a square of arms big enough for a garrison of three thousand].

Estrada thus performs a bold re-appropriation of Renaissance ideals of monumentality and conviviality. This move is best reflected in the words of his Neapolitan wife, whose impact in the narration is as weak as that of the six children she gives him; when asked to choose a husband among her suitors, her answer “O el español o un convento” [It’s either the Spaniard, or a convent for me] (204) suggests that, given a choice in enclosure, the Spanish one should be the most illustrious. Estrada’s writing is, I would argue, particularly sensitive to the act of demarcating, of tracing new borders that protect and seal from external aggression. As a result, cities are viewed as defensive compounds rather than as communal spaces to visit and share with others, and only those structures with obvious military properties –like the “hermosura y variedad” (236) of the naval fleet he sails on against the Turks– deserve open praise. As he travels within the confines of the empire, some of its major sites become open spaces for occupation and manipulation in which the shape and nature of their *tegumenta*, their enclosure materials, are paramount. Having thus flirted with the picaresque novel and the *novela cortesana* up until now, Estrada displays in his Italian journeys the rhetoric of the military memoirist, peppering his discourse with facts belonging to narrative sub-genres like the *hoja de servicios*: figures on salaries, number of soldiers recruited, nationalities of the different battalions, etc. As he tightens up his writing by favoring action over depiction, the world of the family and the court is superseded by a predominantly male universe where violence and revenge are the ruling codes of honor.

But it is when he leaves Italy that his narrative voice begins to falter due to the magnitude of the events he experiences first hand. In his attempt to best chronicle the political and capture the environmental, he begins to experience an invasive reversal of what had constituted his initial presence in Spain’s Italian possessions –the colonizer, in simple terms, becomes the colonized. This process is manifested, in the words of Sanjay Subrahmanyam regarding early modern historiographical discourse, when his “inner core” is abruptly inhabited by its “outer counterpart” (36), terms that I find particularly useful given Estrada’s concern with bodily and narrative preservation. This outer counterpart comes in the shape of new languages, new landscapes, and new

military duties that pose unexpected challenges to his skills as a mercenary. But, most importantly, it comes in the form of the new realities –both in terms of the quotidian and the exceptional– imposed by unfamiliar landscapes, languages, and dress codes.¹⁸ By the fourteenth chapter, for instance, he has already traveled through parts of Transylvania and the Balkans, being now fully involved in the political intrigues of the Holy Roman Empire, particularly those of the Austrian House of Habsburg –including the mighty Bohemia and Hungary, with some eight million subjects.¹⁹ The so-called phase of the “Swedish intervention” (1630-35) has added a new dimension to the Thirty Years’ War, and the events he now witnesses involve some of the most prominent commanders and battles of the time. Beyond the confines of the Spanish empire, his voice is now shaped by the novelties of the unknown, as his inner core is inevitably defined by otherness rather than sameness. As a result, he ceases to be the hyper-masculinized, lawless swashbuckler of his Italian adventures, and becomes a double servant to both the elite of the European royalty, *and* the survival of his own memoir. Strength and bravado are substituted, as proven by his ingenious defense of the Frauenberg Castle in Saxony (1631), by the shrewdness of a wise man in his forties. His writing has now turned a new page, and what defines the rest of his Northern sojourn is a clear attempt at serious historiography where he reflects on the causes and effects of the events he is witnessing. These are, evidently, some of the most interesting passages of the book, as Estrada skillfully maps out the religious and geopolitical landscape of Central Europe, providing a fascinating portrait of the war’s underbelly from a perspective that involves the different roles of its major players.

This new emphasis on the virtues of *witnessing* rather than *doing* reflects the necessary adjustments imposed by Estrada’s aging body. Having thus offered a display of bellicose events of historical magnitude, he now turns into the chronicler of the minute and the unexpected –a true *relación de sucesos*, in his own words–, exemplified by the famous 1631 eruption of Vesuvius. Some of these unique events, such as the royal wedding of Philip III’s daughter, Princess Mary with Ferdinand III, King of Hungary and Bohemia, receive as much space as the international conflicts that are defining Europe, but Estrada’s voice remains as “grandiloquent” as “self-effacing” (trans. Amelang 166); hence his narrative disclaimer: “such an account needed a more elegant pen, more subtle judgment, more discursive rhetoric, and more

¹⁸ Throughout the narration Estrada not only displays a fine ear for linguistic nuances, but also a vast and sophisticated vocabulary, in particular when it comes to clothing, warfare and maritime lexicon. He frequently digresses on poetry, theater, and on some of his most illustrious contemporaries, like his admired Lope de Vega. On the ever-changing relations between clothing and identity in Duque de Estrada, see Juárez Almendros 175-97; for a more detailed account of Duque de Estrada’s literary style, as well as of his literary tastes, see Randolph Pope 173-95, and Alessandro Cassol 2004, 41-53.

¹⁹ Chapters VI-XIV of *Comentarios* were written in 1630 in Baltasar de Marradas’ palace in Hluboká (Southern Bohemia). Josef Forbelský meticulously reconstructs the political background of the time, while Howard Louthan delves on the Catholic forces operating in Bohemia. For a comprehensive account of these territories as depicted in early modern Spanish theater, see Henry Sullivan.

pure, terse, and polished language” (trans. Amelang 167).²⁰ With his presence in the text heavily diminished, his final stint as a friar is nothing but an attempt to recover part of his lost supremacy, so he can regain enough narrative weight to successfully close his memoir with a few words of wisdom for the reader –including the wording of the title. In his new life as a seasoned “soldier in the image of a friar” –or, in his horticultural image of epidermal rupture, a “*fraile injerto en soldado*” (490; italics are mine)– he fulfills all the challenges he had left unfinished during his years as a mercenary. And yet, his spirit remains troubled until the last page: *Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo* ends, unsurprisingly at this point, with the chronicle of the 1646 earthquake in the Campania region, a life-altering phenomenon that works as the only event capable of silencing him –a sort of early modern *après moi, le déluge* farewell that seems to perfectly fit with his bigger-than-life persona.

3. The Height of Empire: Estrada’s gender

The embodiment in the *Comentarios* of a colonizing, homogenizing force that attempts to erase the cultural individuality of each of the territories visited defines Estrada’s *other* battlefield, the physical struggle that, unlike his successful narrative journey, inevitably ends in an overarching sense of failure. As he reinvents himself according to the different strokes of Fortune, he realizes that an insurmountable distance separates the ideal from the facts of being a Castilian soldier in the European frontline. Having left Spain as a both a fugitive and a cuckold, he sees in Italy a new beginning through which to replace an individual notion of *class* by a collective, ambassadorial spirit of *nation*. The shame inflicted on his name is now substituted by a new, healthy ideal of ‘Spanishness’ to be spread throughout Europe. Such is the case when he visits those territories of the Italian Peninsula with a strong Castilian flavor, in which he constantly reminds the reader about the virtues of being not only Spanish, but also a Spanish male, given that places like Rome and Naples were oftentimes portrayed as ‘feminized’ cities suffering from rampant sodomy and prostitution. This is precisely what defines his experience in Naples, as he quickly shines by mastering a number of activities related to –one could even say *engrained in*– his aristocratic upbringing: the art of horse riding, the talent for writing *comedias nuevas*,²¹ the ability to play games of arms, to dance *a la española* by request²² and even to bullfight. He actively participates, for example, in the festivities of Carnival, benefiting from the ‘licentiousness’ of the Italian courtesans, “cuyas ceremonias eran besar la boca a los caballeros” [whose festive rituals consist of kissing the gents on their mouths] (175).

²⁰ On writing as self-effacement, see Paul De Man’s classic essay.

²¹ On the Spanish literary circles in Estrada’s Naples, see Otis Green 1933.

²² As Estrada indicates later on, he masters the art of the *gallarda*, the *pavana*, the *alta*, the *baja*, the *turdión*, the *rastro*, and the *canario* (347), all of them typical Spanish dances of the time that were successfully adopted and imitated by other Europeans while being deplored at home because of their highly sensual content.

This display of ‘Castilian prowess,’ however, is shared in these pages with a number of more dubious achievements. Estrada enjoys loitering in the city’s public fountains, where he gathers at night with other swashbucklers to bully tavern owners, to steal delicacies from the bakers, and to play tricks on the local ladies in order to see their undergarments. He thus embodies the stereotyped attitude of the Spanish soldier in Europe, who was frequently despised because of his swagger, and subsequently chastised with nicknames such as *Spaccamontagne*, *Rodomonti* and *Matamori* by the Italians (Croce 1947, 358), and as “the savage war-dogs of Spain” by the Dutch (González de León 2003, 245).²³ There is, indeed, a political reading behind this behavior, which certainly mirrors the anxieties of the Spanish population in the Italian Peninsula: as Thomas Dandeleet, Michael Levin, and Gianvittorio Signorotto have recently pointed out in different studies, Spanish domination was just an ideal that never bore the desired fruits.²⁴ It is significant that this misguided ambassador called Don Diego Duque de Estrada soon finds himself scolded by the Viceroy himself due to his “valentías,” that is, his misdeeds as a colonial force of disorder that leads to “cuchilladas del cuartel de noche, matracas a las cortesanas, fiestas de los pasteleros y chorrillos, heridas y muertes” [nightly stabbings, ugly pranks, wounds and deaths] (201).

This excess in bravura is the result of a personal limitation that is simultaneously disclosed and repudiated by the author. As Randolph Pope has indicated (172-73), throughout the narration Estrada alludes no less than seven times to his limited stature. His embarrassing height forces him to remind the reader time and again that, in spite of his nickname *Jabalier petito* on the European battlefield, his masculinity is unquestionable. He is, by his own account, short but courageous, the prototype of the *miles gloriosus* that compensates his physical limitations with a good dose of boisterousness. Such physical feature triggers two key narrative moves designed to preserve a minimum of ‘Spanish height,’ even when being occasionally impressed by the size of the locals –as happens to be the case in his Balkan journeys. On the one hand, his memoir is peppered with images of penetration, specifically when referring to combat scenes like the naval battle against the Venetians, in which the leading Spanish galleon tears off the hymen-like enemy sails and successfully “penetrates” its web of ships dissolving their unity and wrecking havoc. On the other hand, Estrada never fails to remind the reader of his unwavering manhood: he defines himself as a “desenfrenado caballo bárbaro” [wild, reckless horse] (137), and finds Italian fashion “inconvenient,” thus refusing to wear some thin garments he is offered. When he is sent to prison later on, he is harassed by a group of young homosexuals, “mozuelos nefandos” who want to kiss him and grope him, apparently resisting all advances. Both strategies, once again, reveal a specific concern with epidermal rupture, with the

²³ The topic has received recent scrutiny in Alain Bersacq and Bernardo García García; in an excellent anthology by Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo and Maureen Quilligan; and in Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez.

²⁴ See Thomas J. Dandeleet, chapter 6; Gianvittorio Signorotto; Michael J. Levin, 200-01.

transition from *cutis* to *pellis* –from living to violated skin– as a threat to what Steven Connor has termed the “principle of entirety,” or oneness (10). The whole book is, indeed, a struggle against narrative and biographical fragmentation; much like his narrative inner core was exposed to countless novelties that threatened the survival of his voice, his physical integrity must constantly be preserved from any type of external aggressor. Estrada’s *entirety* is ultimately driven by a religious worldview that was defined by Benedetto Croce as narrow-minded and superstitious (Croce 1947, 338), for his alleged rectitude is coupled with the virility of the Castilian Catholic: geographically central, chronologically ancestral, and morally untainted. This would explain, for instance, his refusal to marry a Jewish woman named Raquel, as well as his appetite for plundering exotic objects from heretic hands. In the tradition of the Italian *condottieri* of the previous four centuries, Don Diego steals at the slightest opportunity: velvet and gold from the Turks, and glass from the Venetians, whose army is made of “luteranos holandeses, y que vivían en su pésima secta tan perniciosa” (219), “gente maligna [...] de la secta de Calvino, y de Lutero” [Calvinist and Lutheran Dutchmen, evil people living in a sinful sect] (244). What was, in the wrong hands, an open door to vice and weakness quickly becomes a sign of cultural and social capital once it becomes part of his personal loot. With his cultural roots nowhere in sight after so many years of roaming and rambling, his *oneness* is defined not by what he is, but rather by what he refuses to be.

All these concerns on class, gender and nation ultimately reflect a crisis in the representation of the martial subject as a national icon. *Comentarios* mirrors the existing debates in the field of early modern military theory over the balance between discipline and ethics when fighting a war. Estrada is the natural heir to an intramural discourse harking back to the humanist circles of the previous century, which by the 1600s had already branched into two forms, the professional and the chivalric. New ideals of military conduct in the professional literature of the time canonized the model of the *soldado plático*, or military technician, over the old-fashioned *caballero esforzado*, or enterprising knight (Fernando González de León 2003, 250).²⁵ Don Diego’s view of the battlefield thus oscillates between the attention to martial ethics and the technical aspects of his craft, such as ballistics, recruitment, and fortification. His ethos as an evolving soldier –from his career in Naples under the Viceroy Lemos and Osuna (1614-21), to his achievements in Sicily under its Viceroy Filibert, Duke of Savoy (1623), and in Saxony under General Barradas (1630)– is initially shaped by his father’s advice. He must behave as a *caballero esforçado*, always displaying mercy (*templanza*) to the defeated enemy by avoiding the trappings of greed and revenge:

A la guerra vas; sigue las pisadas de tus padres y antepasados; espero de tu

²⁵ On the theoretical foundations of the Neoscholastic doctrine of the just war, see J. A. Fernández Santamaría 130-43; for a general overview of military modernization in early modern Europe, see Brian M. Downing. For a fascinating discussion on these two types of soldiers in a number of 16th-century texts, see Miguel Martínez.

valor no menos hazañas; evita las ocasiones de disgusto, y sucedido, pierde la vida y no la honra; hazte siempre estimar por tus obras y no por tu sangre; no pidas la vida a quien te venciere ni la niegues a quien te la pide, pues tener vida rendida es muerte infame, y matar al rendido no es victoria, sino cobardía e infamia. Esto es en cuanto al honor del mundo. Pero el verdadero consejo que yo te doy es que temas a Dios, reverencias a sus ministros y defiendas la ley. (158)

[You are going to fight a war; follow the steps of your parents and of your ancestors; I expect no less from your valor; avoid danger, but, in case it came to you, [be prepared to] lose your life before losing your honor; be esteemed by your deeds and not by your blood; do not beg for your life to the one who defeats you, and do not deny it to the one who begs it from you, for to live a surrendered life is to have a tainted death, and to kill the defeated [enemy] is not victory, but cowardice. All this regarding worldly honor. But the best advice I can give you is to fear and respect God, his Ministers and the Law].

However, as the narration advances, Estrada evolves into a lawless “dog of war,” honoring a tradition of famous Spanish *hidalgo* soldiers like Sancho de Londoño and Francisco de Valdés, who defended the Duke of Alba’s harsh treatment of enemy combatants in the religious wars against the Dutch Calvinists (1567-73), and displayed no moral dimension in their memoirs. Having entered the military as a foot soldier, Estrada narrates his rise through the ranks due to his shrewdness, not to his family tree. Like a seasoned mercenary, he lines up with what has been called, in terms of *jus ad bellum*, “the school of Alba:” duels, sackings, torture, sneak attacks, ambushes, and dilatory maneuvers. By favoring unrestrained warfare, he sees the military as the only way to advance socially against an ideal of aristocratic hierarchy, conceiving personal reputation “from a goal-oriented to a procedure-based concept” (González de León, 2003, 261).²⁶

It is this relentless *procedure* that establishes the book’s narrative time, a time recorded by the inscriptions on a body that is itself recording time. If, as Elaine Scarry has argued, bodily pain is “language-destroying” (19, 35), pain is here trivialized when objectified by an excess that leaves the reader numb. Estrada’s double journey is that of the writer and the *graptoi* (*γραπτοι*), the written-upon, the bearer of wounds that scar and seal their *-his-* transcendence. But the more he insists on his manhood, the more whimsical and humorous the narration becomes, the *shorter* his stature gets: if all his near-death experiences offered him a chance at renewal, the overwhelming presence of blood often leads to fabulous situations where the chivalric ideal of his ancestors is parodied, even ridiculed. Much like Don Quixote in his personal quest (as

²⁶ For more on this debate, see Puđu 244-46.

reflected, for example, in his bloody battle with the Basque in I, 8-9), pen and blazon go hand in hand throughout the narration, as the acts of writing and bleeding trigger one another –except when the hand stops to heal the lesions. The ‘weight’ of the written word thus counteracts the increasing fragility of a body that is reinventing itself continuously, rehearsing death in life and literature, proving, in the words of Valéry, that *nothing is deeper in man than his skin*. And this transforming bodily journey is, I would argue, what defines the loss he experiences when gradually colonized by his outer counterpart: at the intersection of a disappearing aristocratic ethos tied to his name and the emerging persona of the ruthless mercenary lies his final *desengaño* in both its length –for it is what it takes to find such balance– and its height –for it is what it takes to make it memorable.

4. Mapping the Battlefield

In its formal heterogeneity and its thematic paradoxes, *Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo* is the most compelling testimony of a historical crisis that was also captured in first-person accounts by other early modern Spanish soldiers such as Alonso de Contreras and Jerónimo de Pasamonte, texts that are no doubt part of the same tradition.²⁷ By providing contemporary readers with a fascinating glimpse at the empire beyond Spain, these memoirists raised a number of pivotal issues that have not been fully addressed by modern scholarship. If poet-soldiers of the previous century like Garcilaso de la Vega (1498?-1536) and Gutierre de Cetina (1520-57) shaped a vernacular kind of heroism tied to their legendary lives and untimely deaths, a similar enterprise was carried out by these war veterans in their depiction of the darker side of the soldierly experience. This necessity to chronicle the experience of loss is an important one, since it can provide present scholars with new insights from a threefold perspective: on the issues that are directly or indirectly tackled in these texts; on the potential for innovation within the discipline of early modern “literature;” and on the genre of early modern autobiography in Spain.

Thematically, the war veteran raises a number of questions that have not received enough scrutiny. The fortunes of the calamitous destiny of the ‘broken Spaniard,’ as *Comentarios* indicate, offer different answers beyond those related to a specific kind of self-fashioning: they denounce the ills of contemporary society; they express a certain nostalgia for a chivalric ethos long gone; and they manage to rewrite, like our modern historians have done, the daily struggles of war from the inside out. Estrada’s memoir, as I have argued here, builds a fascinating account of what it entailed to be a Spaniard in some of the most remote places in Europe, as well as what it meant to be –literally– *homeless*. Whether driven by “a vital desire to order” (Olney 4), or by

²⁷ For an initial approach to Pasamonte, Contreras, and Castro, see Margarita Levisi; Javier Irigoyen-García. For a more comprehensive treatment of the subject in a larger scope of autobiographical texts by soldiers –including Duque de Estrada’s– see Elide Pittarello; and Cassol 2000, 176-201.

“one’s desire to endure in memory” (Spadaccini and Talens 15), texts like the *Comentarios* indicate that the only important dichotomy when rewriting war was the memorable / unmemorable, as the political message was not to be found in the narration, but in the act of narrating and, perhaps most importantly, in the moral and physical state of the narrator. But this desire in time, this “preservation fantasy” –to borrow Aaron Kunin’s coinage– does not come from Estrada’s many children or his material assets, but rather from his written recollection as proof of existence of one (soldier) among many. In this sense, this is a text that forces us to rethink the critical valences of physical pain in the form of epidermal rupture, adding new layers of complexity to what already were –skin and blood– two highly charged cultural concepts that have usually been studied as independent entities. After all, bearing hardship –and seeing it– was not a rare occurrence, given that, as Yuval Harari has written, “suffering from cold and hunger, witnessing extreme cruelty or being subjected to it was the common fare of most early modern civilians from an early age, when hunger and disease killed more people than combat on the battlefield” (104).²⁸

Consequently, the figure of the war veteran is also paramount to the discipline of ‘Golden Age Spain,’ as it can allow contemporary scholars to participate from a trans-Pyrenean perspective in current debates on what has recently been coined ‘*Imperium Studies*.’²⁹ *Comentarios* is a comprehensive vision of early modern warfare that not only touches upon a number of pivotal individual and collective beliefs, but one that also advances a detailed cartography of many European nation-states that were rarely visited in the literary production of the time. Estrada’s continuous fear of effacement as a mercenary and as a chronicler unveils the many perils of his profession while illuminating the artistic craftsmanship of a type of writing as complex and multifaceted as life itself. But this heterogeneity is precisely its most fruitful element, as it offers invaluable tools for historians and literary critics alike, addressing issues of interest to scholars of diplomatic and cultural history, gender theory, disability studies and, perhaps most importantly, to those willing to offer a more nuanced perspective of the social and economic conditions of the time. In its conflation of fact and fiction, Estrada’s legacy addresses important questions on truth and authorship, as well as on the reliability of language in the depiction of violence and death. It thus highlights the need to pay closer attention to a whole tradition of texts that, beyond their value as historical records, define the emergence of modern autobiography while providing a more nuanced landscape of life during war. Memoirs like this one compel us to engage critically into what has lately been considered an ‘authorial resurrection,’ paying renewed attention to those who created the work under scrutiny as well as to the conditions that enabled their craft. Our understanding of Estrada’s personal quest is, as I have argued in this essay, mediated by gender and class as much as it is by questions of authority, as the history of imperialism runs hand in hand with the construction of

²⁸ A very similar assessment is given by Estrada himself in 250-51.

²⁹ For a recent theorization on Spanish imperial expansion, see Barbara Fuchs.

the authorial figure itself.

It has been the work of non-Spanish critics –from Croce to Levisi, from Pope to Ettinghausen, from Pittarello to Cassol– that has given *Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo* the opportunity to remain alive for its modern readers, as if Spanish scholars had refused altogether to examine critically this unfortunate side of the military experience. Such trend should be reversed, for I believe that a fresh reassessment of these texts can ultimately bridge an unjustified critical gap between a very informative line of work by historians and a long-standing tradition of editing personal accounts that dates back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. After all, it takes a war, as Brecht’s nameless soldier of the Thirty Years’ War reminds us, to experience a glimpse of order –and to enjoy today the *ordered*, constructed personality of a traveler who is never at ease in his own skin. The great abundance of soldier-writers and memoirs thus still offers ample ground for exploration, as Diego Duque de Estrada’s battlefield is not the only one that needs re-mapping.

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