

The News from Paraguay Study Guide

The News from Paraguay by Lily Tuck

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Plot Summary

When Ella, a divorcee living in Paris, meets Franco, the heir to the Paraguayan throne, there is instant chemistry. When Franco returns with his new mistress to his native land, though, he finds enemies even in his own family. As he takes power, Franco's arrogance threatens to tear the country apart. He quickly finds himself in a war against three other nations, which he vows to fight to the end. Ella is forced to choose between Franco and her children.

Ella Lynch is an aspiring socialite in Paris in the mid-1800s who is looking for someone to "fix" her money problems. She becomes infatuated with Francisco Solano Lopez, the heir to the presidency of Paraguay. He is suave and an excellent lover, and Ella makes plans to follow him back to his home country.

Ella and Franco depart for Buenos Ayres by boat, along with her maid, Spanish instructor and favorite horse. The voyage leaves many of them seasick. Franco is returning to his father, the president, along with his brothers and sisters, who he despises. Ella finds out mid-voyage that she is pregnant.

Ella stays in Buenos Ayres while Franco goes on ahead to Asuncion. Ella acquires the services of an American doctor, Henry Kennedy. Juan Francisco is born healthy and given a wet nurse named Rosaria. The entire group sets out for Paraguay, first by steamer and then overland. Ella's maid hurts her arm badly and dies en route.

Ella loves Asuncion, but she hates her sisters-in-law. They don't want her to assume an official position, since she isn't married to Franco. The episode is further complicated when the bishop refuses to baptize Juan Francisco, nicknamed Pancho. Both Ella and Franco blame Franco's family.

After Ella and Franco lose their second child, Ella begins work on her palace, called Obispo Cue. It is to be grand and pink. She gives birth to four more sons in the following years: Enrique Venancio, Federico, Carlos Honorio and Leopoldo Antonio. In that same year, Franco's father dies, and Franco officially takes power over the country.

Franco takes revenge on the people who he perceives embarrassed him regarding his first son's baptism. He puts his brother Benigno on trial and has him exiled to a remote house. He also makes plans for a political marriage, but he is snubbed by the Emperor of Brazil. Dr. Kennedy dies on an expedition to a remote lake.

Franco consolidates his absolute hold on power. He also starts preparing for war, massing troops on his border for an attack on Argentina or Brazil. His oldest son, Pancho, is already starting to show some of his father's sadistic tendencies. He buries one of his brothers in the garden up to his neck.

Franco attacks Brazil without warning, which draws the ire of the United States minister. His troops overwhelm and capture an important Brazilian province. Franco also attacks



to the south and takes the Argentine fortifications at Humaita. Suddenly, Paraguay is at war with three separate nations, all of which sign a treaty against Paraguay.

Ella arrives at Humaita, sees the odds stacked against Franco and for the first time considers fleeing to France with her children. Franco has a superb defensive position at the fort, but he squanders it by going on the attack and losing many troops. Ella gives birth to another child, but he dies shortly after birth. Franco meets with an Allied general to discuss truce terms but walks out when he is told that his resignation is part of the deal.

Franco's commander in chief, General Diaz, scores a victory just south of Humaita, and Franco watches the battle through his field glasses. After celebrating with Franco, Diaz becomes very overconfident and is wounded by one of his own torpedoes. He dies shortly thereafter.

Franco's army is outnumbered more than two to one, and most of his troops are old men and boys. Ella resorts to stealing jewelry from a sacred statue in a small village. Franco starts a tactical retreat, taking his men through a treacherous swamp in the process. He then sets up a new headquarters at the hilltop town of San Fernando. He has his brothers and his brother-in-law arrested for treason, tortured and killed. He also has his sisters publicly flogged.

The residents of Asuncion panic when Brazilian ships approach. Many flee the city. Ella evacuates with the children to join Franco, who retreats once again and barely escapes as many more of his troops die to protect him. His once proud army is reduced to barely one thousand troops.

Ella relocates to the quiet town of Piribebuy. The Brazilians overrun and brutalize Asuncion. When they make it to Piribebuy, she flees yet again. Many others in the town are captured or killed. Franco joins his family with the last of his troops. The family wakes to find themselves abandoned by the remaining soldiers. Franco has his family leave and rides off, with the Brazilians close behind. He becomes mired in the mud and is killed on the banks of the Aquidaban River. Ella is apprehended shortly thereafter and Pancho is killed while defending his mother. Ella is brought back to the site of Franco's death. She helps drag the body to shore and bury it. Then, she and her remaining sons are finally allowed to leave.

Ella and her sons travel to Paris, and finding war with Prussia imminent, they go on to England. Ella uses much of her money to put her kids in school. The man she sent material to "just in case" suddenly refuses to help her. She returns to Paris after the war. Two of her sons return to Paraguay several years later to try and reclaim the family land, but they are ordered to leave. Ella becomes confused in her old age and looks in the streets of Paris for people from her past who are long since dead. She looks especially for Franco, but she never does find him.



Chapter 1: Paris

Chapter 1: Paris Summary

Ella Lynch is an aspiring socialite living in Paris in 1854. She is also a good friend of Princess Mathilde, who supposedly has relations to Napoleon. A parrot feather falls from her hat, and Francisco Solano Lopez stops to pick it up. He is only twenty-six years old and an ambassador to Europe, and his father is president of Paraguay. Ella takes no notice. She is living with a Russian Count named Dimitri and not looking for someone else. Ella has servants and pretends to be wealthy, but in fact she hasn't paid her servants in a month. She left Ireland at age ten after changing her name, married a French army officer at fifteen and was already divorced and living with the Russian Count at nineteen. Her servant Marie is a French gossip, which helps in Paris.

Francisco, nicknamed Franco, notices Ella at a party. He delivers his calling card to her home. By bribing the valet, his card is put on top. Franco is intelligent and suave, with an almost unlimited supply of money. He has even brought his own band from Paraguay. Ella discovers that Dimitri is leaving to fight on the Crimean front. She is devastated and worried about him getting killed. She attends another party to honor Napoleon. She sees Franco and later writes in her diary that he is stalking her. Ella is also concerned about Dimitri. She begs him not to go, but he says it is a matter of honor. They fight, and she scratches his face. Dimitri stalks out angrily, and Ella realizes that she loves him. He returns to say goodbye, but she refuses to admit him.

Ella visits the stable to ride her favorite gray mare, but it is gone. She screams at the groom to get her favorite horse, and he responds that she hasn't paid them. She discovers that Franco has hired out her horse by bribing her groom. Franco offers to buy the horse, and Ella is infuriated. He buys it, but then he gives it to her. They make love and become romantically involved.

Ella is elated not to have to worry about money. She wakes up next to Franco and is happy. Marie discovers this, but she is happy just to be paid. Ella agrees to accompany Franco back to Paraguay, although she still plans to return to Paris someday.

Chapter 1: Paris Analysis

The initial character development of Franco shows that he is a suave man who usually gets what he wants. Hints of his callousness and arrogance are seen, foreshadowing his future behavior. Ella and Franco are a couple, although it is uncertain at this point in the novel what type of relationship they will eventually have. That both are superficial is certain. Ella is in love, at least the love that she is capable of. She is also elated not to have money worries anymore. Her superficiality is almost humorous at this point in the novel, although it has much more serious repercussions later on.



Chapter 2: Tacuari

Chapter 2: Tacuari Summary

Ella and Franco leave for Buenos Ayres in November. They are returning to Franco's home country of Paraguay with all of their possessions in a huge steamer ship. Marie, the maid, also follows with Dona Ines, Ella's Spanish instructor. Dona repeats stories about her father in the Spanish Army. The Atlantic crossing is to take three weeks. Ella is sick most of the time, and Franco is nervous because he doesn't like water. Ella and Franco have separate rooms, but they have sexual relations throughout the voyage. Ella has taken along her horse, which she names Mathilde after her friend.

Franco is very virile and masturbates to help himself stay in control around Ella. His father, Don Carlos Antonio Lopez, is the president of Paraguay, but his mother's side has the money in the family. He is the oldest of his siblings. He considers his sisters Rafaela and Inocencia very lazy. His brothers are Venancio and Benigno. He doesn't trust his brothers, especially Benigno, who is his mother's favorite.

Franco has been with many women and has no emotion for them, but he finally fell in love with a woman named Carmencita, who spurned him. She had to marry a man named Carlos. Due to financial problems, Don Carlos Antonio Lopez, Franco's father, instructed Franco to arrest Carlos, Carmencita's fiancé. Franco told Carmencita that he would go easy on her fiancé if she would have sex with him. She refused, and Franco had Carlos shot before dumping the body in front of her house. When Carmencita saw the corpse, she physically mutilated herself rather than have Franco.

Marie finds out about Ella and Franco having sex from doing Ella's laundry. She also realizes that Ella is pregnant.

Chapter 2: Tacuari Analysis

Franco's character is being developed as a brutal, cold man. He has had hundreds of women, but Ella is his "second love." Throughout much of his past, women were purely objects for sexual gratification. This callousness is a major part of his personality and becomes more significant the more power he has. This aspect of his personality grows to overwhelming proportions when he has no accountability for his actions.



Chapter 3: Buenos Ayres

Chapter 3: Buenos Ayres Summary

The ship arrives in the city of Buenos Ayres in December of 1854. Franco plans to go ahead by mule to Paraguay while Ella stays in the city to have the baby. She stays in the suite at the Hotel Victoria. She still wonders what has become of Dimitri. Dr. Henry Kennedy, an American, is her doctor. He fled to South America after a scandal in the United States. Marie dictates a letter to her sister back in France.

Even though pregnant, Ella goes to parties and lives the high life in Buenos Ayres. She puts up Mathilde in a posh stable. The groom she hires to tend for her horse is killed by bandits while riding him. Ella is upset by this, because of both his death and the possible trauma to the animal. Her water breaks while she is on her way back to the city.

Chapter 3: Buenos Ayres Analysis

In Buenos Ayres, Ella learns just how much she loves living the good life. While in Paris, she pretended to be important. In Buenos Ayres, she finally is able to attend parties and perform social functions as she wants. Ella is not the type of person to let something as minor as a pregnancy get in her way. She now sees her future with Franco as something she has always dreamed of and deserves.



Chapter 4: Villa Franca

Chapter 4: Villa Franca Summary

Juan Francisco is a happy, healthy baby with a wet nurse named Rosaria. The entire ensemble is to travel together. They set out by steamer with some others bound for Paraguay. Ella is having trouble starting a conversation with a woman on the boat because everybody knows that she is a mistress. The woman's small dog is also a constant annoyance to her, so Ella leaves the ship to travel with her horse overland. A small escort accompanies her. Marie is not accustomed to traveling on horseback and breaks her arm in a fall. Dr. Kennedy leaves the steamer to assist and finds that Marie has a bad compound fracture. He amputates the arm. Meanwhile, Ella has left Marie behind. She feels bad about leaving the ship after hearing what happened. Marie is delirious due to losing so much blood. Ella returns and tries to help Marie at a nearby army post. Marie's health deteriorates, and she dies several days later.

Chapter 4: Villa Franca Analysis

Ella's annoyance with a passenger on the steamer en route to Paraguay takes her on a course of action that ends up getting Marie killed. She feels momentarily bad, but she quickly gets over it. This lack of emotion becomes her trademark throughout the story as she follows Franco into the abyss of war.



Chapter 5: Asuncion

Chapter 5: Asuncion Summary

In December of 1855, Ella writes to Princess Mathilde about living in Asuncion, the Paraguayan capital city. Franco's sisters rebuff Ella by refusing to talk to her. They spit at her and ridicule her clothes. Ella grows to despise them in return.

The previous dictator of Paraguay, Don Jose Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia, has isolated the country from the rest of the world. He was a paranoid man who was so terrified of being killed that he would force his people to stay indoors when he rode through the streets. Thousands of innocent people crowded the jails. Fear of him was so powerful that even after his death, he was known simply as "the deceased."

Because Franco and Ella aren't married, the bishop refuses to baptize baby Juan Francisco. He is also Don Carlos Antonio Lopez's brother. Don Carlos' wife and daughters are also not interested in Franco's bastard son being an heir, so they pressure Don Carlos. He refuses to intervene when Franco protests. The Bishop announces that any priest baptizing Franco and Ella's child will be excommunicated. Franco and Ella fume. Franco has nicknamed his son Pancho, and they play together constantly. Ella has picked up Spanish very well by this point.

Franco commands a 101-gun salute from the troops to honor his son in lieu of the baptism. The vibrations cause a field gun to fire, killing several people at the hospital. Franco and Ella are both horrified and embarrassed. She vows to take revenge on her sisters-in-law.

Franco has invited a large group of colonists from France to start a vineyard in the Chaco area, a deeply forested area near Asuncion. They arrive to great fanfare, and Franco and Ella are elated. When they arrive at Chaco, they find it flooded. Months later, it becomes too dry to grow anything. Franco ignores their desperate letters for help. The settlers are unaccustomed to the inhospitable climate, and most are dead after only eight months.

Franco shows himself to be a very jealous man. He accuses Ella of having a lover. When he gives her a gift necklace of aquamarine stones for forgiveness, Ella realizes that he probably has another lover. She puts on the necklace anyway.

Chapter 5: Asuncion Analysis

The new reigning couple's arrogance and insensitivity is showcased by the fate of the French colonists in the Paraguayan jungle. On a whim, Franco asks for colonists to journey to Paraguay, where he will send them to Chaco to prosper. Franco and Ella have sophisticated visions of a South American Paris. Reality turns out to be a far different matter. The area the colonists are sent to would have been difficult to settle by

almost anyone. The inexperienced Europeans are simply no match for the extremes of flood and drought, tropical heat, deadly wildlife and dangerous natives. An unbiased person could have seen they had no chance. Franco and Ella don't like to hear bad news. They simply ignore the settlers' letters for help. This uncaring attitude costs many lives and is a bad harbinger for things to come.



Chapter 6: Obispo Cue

Chapter 6: Obispo Cue Summary

Ella gives birth to her second child with Franco, Corinna Adelaida. She lives only five months before dying suddenly of no apparent cause. Franco tries to comfort Ella by promising her another child, but she won't hear of it. She holds the dead child for nearly a day before finally consenting to a burial.

The couple is building a palace, called Obispo Cue, and Ella wants it to be pink. It is the first building in Asuncion to be built of marble. Ella puts her efforts into the planning of their home. The house is completed in June of 1859. Ella complains that it needs repainting three times to get the right shade of pink. Franco then has an opera house built, and opening night is a very social event. Ella sits in a box seat separate from the Lopez family. Men generally regard her with interest while their women give jealous looks. Dona doesn't have the heart to tell Marie's sister Yvonne, who is back in France, that her sister is dead, so she writes back to Yvonne pretending to be Marie. Her correspondence states that Marie is married.

Franco is fairly discreet about being with Ella during this time, since they still aren't married. He spends much time with his family. Franco is also starting to make policy decisions due to his father's deteriorating health. Two Paraguayan businessmen have left the country to pursue interests in England without seeking state permission. Franco declares they will be killed if they attempt to reenter the country.

Ella confirms that Franco has several other lovers in Asuncion. Franco feels somewhat guilty about his affairs, but his drive for sex is very powerful. He wants sex only, and if his women try to make conversation, he tells them to shut up or leave.

Ella gives birth to a son that summer, Enrique Venancio, named after a friend and military adviser. The friend, Colonel Enrique von Wisner de Morgenstern, has fled Budapest after a sex scandal. He is assisting Ella in fencing lessons. She is left handed, which gives him some difficulty. Federico Noel is born in 1860, followed the next year by Carlos Honorio. Rosaria, the wet nurse, cannot keep up with the children and is given an assistant, Maria Olivia. President Lopez dies in 1862. Ella gives birth to her fifth son, Leopoldo Antonio.

Chapter 6: Obispo Cue Analysis

Franco is what would be described today as a sex addict. His sex drive is so powerful that, when combined with his egotism, it makes him unrepentant about the fact that he is too much for only one woman. On the other hand, Ella quickly grows to know that Franco has other women besides her. She chooses to ignore it, preferring not to risk her lifestyle. This attitude of avoidance pervades Ella's life, such as when she pretends that Maria is still alive.



Chapter 7: Lake Ipacarai

Chapter 7: Lake Ipacarai Summary

In January 1863, General Franco receives a letter of congratulations from Napoleon Bonaparte. Franco has been elected President of Paraguay. He puts his younger brother Benigno on trial immediately for conspiracy against him. Padre Maiz is sent to prison, and Chief Justice Lescano is tortured to death for speaking out against Franco in the "campaign." Benigno is banished to a family estate in a remote part of the country called San Pedro. Franco does this against the wishes of his mother, Dona Juana, because of his brother's bad health. Benigno himself blames Ella for his ordeal as he prepares to move north.

Ella has three ladies in waiting, Senora Dona Dolores, Dona Isidora and Senora Juliana, her favorite. They are celebrating the birth of her fifth son, Antonio. Franco's other brother is to become a cabinet member, as well as many others present. It is an elegant affair, and many men stare at Ella.

In April, Dr. Kennedy takes an expedition to Lake Ipacarai. It takes three days on horseback. He becomes drunk at the lake and propositions one of the young men. In his stupor, Dr. Kennedy hits his head on a rock and lays on the shore unconscious. The men drag him out into the lake and leave him to die.

Franco attempts to learn to swim by following the motions of a frog, a suggestion from his apothecary general. He flails about on his bedroom floor, watching a frog swim in a basin of water nearby. After a month of morning exercise, he loses much weight and finally goes down to the river to attempt an actual swim. There are soldiers testing the water, and a band plays. Despite his "training," Franco nearly drowns. Ella doesn't understand why Paraguayan men can't swim.

Franco tells Ella that he is going to marry Isabella de Braganza for diplomatic reasons. He sends a letter asking the Emperor of Brazil, Dom Pedro, for his daughter's hand in marriage. Ella is angry, but she breaks Franco's composure by telling him that she thinks the woman has a harelip. This upsets Franco. Ella later asks her lady-in-waiting, Senora Juliana, what she would do in a similar situation. Juliana replies that she would take a lover. Dom Pedro does not reply to Franco's letter.

Chapter 7: Lake Ipacarai Analysis

Dom Pedro's inadvertent snub is one of the small incidents that pushes Franco in his emotional state towards war. Franco is never able to look past a grudge. Forgiveness is simply not in his vocabulary. He ends up sacrificing his country for his own ego. The author is showcasing Franco's stubborn behavior with example after example.



Chapter 8: Cerro Leon

Chapter 8: Cerro Leon Summary

The United States minister, Charles Washburn, writes back to the U.S. Secretary of State describing the tyranny of the Lopez dynasty. People who do not conform are jailed for the smallest excuse. The rumor is that Franco is going to change the government to an empire. He is having people arrested on mere whims.

Franco starts massing troops on the border at Cerro Leon and training them to fight. He considers the Argentine Republic a threat that has to be dealt with. He is also worried about Brazil wanting more land. He rides a mule because it stands higher than the native Paraguayan horse and puts him up above his men.

Franco's oldest son, Pancho, is already showing some of his father's tendencies. He is aggressive and unemotional. He plays with his younger brothers Enrique, Federico and Carlos, but Leopoldo is too young to play. Pancho chases them around and eventually catches the youngest, Carlos, who is slow and not good at hiding. After tying him up and throwing oranges at him, Franco buries his brother Carlos up to his neck in the garden. Dona Ines later finds him and digs him up.

Franco is having dinner with his cabinet and family. He asks his brother, the new minister of war, about siding with the Banda Oriental. Franco has the tendency to cut off anyone with a separate opinion on the subject. He rails against the stream of "lies" coming out of Buenos Ayres. Franco rides his mule back and forth to Cerro Leon several times a week. At home, Ella reads to him until he falls asleep.

Frederick Masterman is Franco's apothecary general. He spends much time at the hospital in Asuncion doing inspections. In his free time, he loves sketching people and animals. He also grows poppies for their opium, to be used as medicine.

Chapter 8: Cerro Leon Analysis

Chapter 8 begins with a paragraph that exemplifies Franco's cruel, vengeful nature. In adulthood, he beats a dog similar to one that bit him in childhood. He knows it is not the same dog as he beats it, but he feels a twisted sense of justice. His sadistic side is powerful and hard to control. As president, he has no need to control it anymore. It is becoming more apparent that the character of Franco has no conscience whatsoever.



Chapter 9: Marquez de Olinda

Chapter 9: Marquez de Olinda Summary

Franco has decided that the time is right to attack Brazil. He wants the notoriety that a victory would bring to him, comparing himself to Napoleon. He has his troops seize a Brazilian steamer near Asuncion and jail the crew, including a Brazilian provincial governor. He informs the Brazilian minister that he has severed diplomatic relations and closed river access. He then sends his brother-in-law, General Vincente Barrios, upriver with troops to invade Brazil. Even though ill prepared, since Barrios is too drunk to give orders, they find little resistance and make their way to the provincial capital of Corumba. The troops rape and pillage as they advance. General Barrios commandeers the house of a powerful landowner. He then sends some of his plunder home to his wife, Inocencia, Franco's sister. She takes time going through the goods. Her sister Rafaela is envious. Inocencia also has a parrot that she is trying to train.

Back at Obispo Cue, Dr. Masterman has some difficulty removing an abscessed tooth from Franco's mouth. It takes several men to hold him down. Masterman also listens to wet nurse Maria Oliva's complaints and realizes that she has syphilis. He asks her to see him later at the hospital.

Brazilian troops are also moving down river, towards the Argentine fort of Humaita. It is a strategic location where chains have been placed to block river access. It is swampy terrain, and the going is difficult. The diet is also giving many men dysentery. In fact, so many men have been conscripted that farms in Paraguay are going untilled, leading to vegetable and grain shortages.

Charles Washburn is furious at Franco's actions and protests to no avail. Most appalling is the seizure of the steamer's crew and passengers without prior warning. Franco refuses to consider releasing his prisoners, even when Washburn suggests that the United States might consider assisting Paraguay against Brazil.

The Paraguayan troops seize Montevideo in early 1865, and Franco attempts to ally himself with Banda Oriental. Unfortunately, the new president of Banda Oriental sides with Brazil, so Franco suddenly has multiple enemies. Still, the Paraguayan Congress promotes Franco from general to field marshal. The Paraguayan troops are brutal. Many surrendering troops are shot, including an enemy general.

Chapter 9: Marquez de Olinda Analysis

Franco is characterized as a power-hungry dictator. He has delusions of grandeur, wanting to be like his hero Napoleon. He chooses powerful Brazil to make war on for the notoriety and respect it would give him. This rationale is about as far removed from tactical reasoning as one can imagine, and his emotional decisions foreshadow continuing trouble. The fact that Franco commandeers all of the able-bodied men in the

country for the military, leaving none for essential work like farming, shows his short sightedness. This shortly causes famine to sweep Paraguay, exacerbating Franco's problems.



Chapter 10: Corrientes

Chapter 10: Corrientes Summary

Franco proclaims the urgency of the war against Brazil, Argentina and the Banda Oriental in the newspaper. When Federico finds Maria Olivia dead on the floor, Rosaria wraps her body in the same newspaper. Paraguay seizes a disputed town, and Argentina officially declares war. A triple alliance is formed by treaty between Paraguay's enemies. They agree to fight together until Franco Lopez is out of power. They also agree to split all seized war material.

The entire Paraguayan fleet deploys to Riachuelto, just south of Corrientes, to capture the Brazilian fleet. The ill-conceived plan quickly deteriorates as the fifteen vessels arrive in daylight instead of darkness and are attacked by the waiting Brazilian ships, which are more maneuverable. The battle is over quickly. All of the Paraguayan fleet is lost or captured. The four men who escape and bravely make it back through the jungle to Humaita are jailed by Franco.

Two Paraguayan armies under separate leadership are also to meet at Uruguayana and invade the Rio Grande province of Brazil. General Robles hears of the defeat at Riachuelto and pulls his troops back to Corrientes without informing the other leader, Colonel Estigarribia. The colonel waits for some time before making the mistake of splitting his troops on either side of the river. The Allied army then slaughters the troops on one side as the others look on helplessly. Colonel Estigarribia surrenders, and General Robles is jailed for insubordination. In his rage, Franco has Estigarribia's family killed.

Back at Obispo Cue, Ella is becoming interested in Baron von Fischer-Truenfeld. They go horseback riding and hold each other. The Baron is also having an affair with Dona Dolores, whose husband drowned. Pancho leaves to accompany his father to Humaita. He follows his father around and mimics many of his mannerisms, including smoking cigars. The officers spoil the child. He begins collecting enemy ears. The band follows Franco around wherever he goes. It plays when Franco has General Gobles executed.

Frederick Masterman is promoted to assistant military surgeon. Although most wounded soldiers sent by river to Asuncion die and are thrown overboard, Masterman still estimates that he has seen 50,000 dead. Most of the wounded arrive naked and nearly starved to death.

Chapter 10: Corrientes Analysis

The Paraguayan casualties caused by unskilled military leaders, most of them friends of the family and not necessarily experienced, are appalling. The strategic mistakes made are also catastrophic. Franco takes his policies of punishment to new heights (or depths), when, unable to track down a criminal military leader, he just has the man's

family killed instead. This twisted justice makes sense in Franco's mind. His rage blocks out any sensible actions on his part. Instead of welcoming the four lone escapees from his navy debacle, he has them jailed out of this blind rage. Franco is rapidly losing touch with reality and losing control of himself in the process.



Chapter 11: Humaita

Chapter 11: Humaita Summary

Ella arrives at Humaita with her horse. Franco has given her a new piano that he seized from a nearby landowner. Frederick Masterman also arrives to inspect the field hospital. Most of the wounded are sick with cholera, measles or dysentery. The fort sits on the only high ground overlooking the river. It is well armed, with guns protecting both the land and river areas of the structure.

Ella thinks of leaving Franco and returning to France, but she realizes that she cannot abandon her lover. She does, however, make plans to ship some of her valuables to Paris for safe keeping - just in case. Franco's sisters have refused the proclamation that all Paraguayan women have to contribute their jewelry to the state. Rafaela tells Inocencia that she would rather eat her marriage ring from Saturnino before giving it up to Ella. They envy her increasing jewelry collection.

The Argentines send a dying man across the river with smallpox. He is taken to the hospital at Humaita before he dies. The doctor diagnoses him quickly, but the damage is done. Soon, many Paraguayan troops are coming down with the dreaded pox. Hundreds die. The horses are in bad condition as well, since there is no pasture at Humaita. General Flores masses his fresh Banda Oriental forces, but he bickers with the Argentine general and loses an important opportunity to attack Franco's demoralized forces. The men at Humaita are outnumbered, but they have a great advantage in that the whole area is surrounded by nearly impenetrable marshes. Franco foolishly gives up this defensive advantage by attacking first. His men and horses are slaughtered as they founder in the swamp. His army loses six thousand on the pointless assault. To make up for his losses in the field, Franco demands that all able-bodied men be enlisted into the army. This includes the indigenous Guaycuru Indians, who speak another language and are cannibalistic. Many troops protest, saying that they won't fight along side the Indians.

Franco meets with Allied General Mitre to discuss the terms of a cease-fire. Franco is about to agree when he hears the General's last demand - that Franco resign and leave the country. Franco leaves the table abruptly. He flogs his horse so badly on his return ride that it dies back at the camp. He comes down with malaria, but he quickly recovers.

Ella becomes pregnant again, and Franco accuses her of sleeping with Fischer-Truenfeld. Ella adamantly denies the claim. The child, Miguel Marcial, is born prematurely and dies two weeks later. Franco wants to flog Rosaria, who cared for the frail infant, but Ella won't allow it.

Chapter 11: Humaita Analysis

There are no rules to war in this time period. Argentina makes the strategic decision to have a dying man with smallpox infiltrate the Paraguayan lines. This is a very dirty method of attack, but it is effective nonetheless. In the mid-1800s, smallpox is a devastating disease. In the hospitals, where most men are already weak, it is lethal. Franco may be sadistic in nature, but his rivals are no saints either. However, Franco's emotional decisions are much less effective, as seen when he gives up his defensive position in the swamp.



Chapter 12: Curupayty

Chapter 12: Curupayty Summary

Franco's military engineer, Lieutenant-Major George Thompson, is constructing earthworks at Curupayty, south of Humaita. There, the Paraguayans launch torpedoes at the Brazilian fleet, although most are ineffective. Franco's commander in chief, General Diaz, arrives and guarantees a victory. Franco watches the battle through his field glasses from Humaita. The Argentinean troops are mowed down when they get close to Thompson's trench. Franco is elated and becomes badly drunk in celebration with General Diaz. The general grows more arrogant after his victory, believing himself impervious to danger. A torpedo injures Diaz while he is rowing in his canoe, and his leg is amputated. He dies shortly thereafter from infection.

Frederick Masterman is arrested abruptly and jailed for no apparent reason. Perplexed, Masterman spends his time in the dank cell watching the habits of his cellmates: spiders, scorpions and toads. He is released after seven months and travels to the home of an Englishman he knows. At first, he is unrecognizable to his friend. His freedom has actually been obtained at the persistence of Charles Washburn. His interests are somewhat selfish; he needs a doctor for his wife's pregnancy. It is a difficult birth, but eventually it is successful, thanks to Masterman's skill.

Chapter 12: Curupayty Analysis

Franco's arrogance is contagious. His winning commander in chief becomes deluded that he is invincible after some luck in the field. Actually, his rivals are just more inept than he is. This costs him his life in a very short amount of time. Franco is shocked at having lost the man who has just handed him his first real victory. He is living more and more in a delusional state now. He has no realistic chance of winning, but he convinces himself otherwise. None of his advisers have the backbone to have him face reality, with good reason, since he does not accept criticism.



Chapter 13: Gran Chaco

Chapter 13: Gran Chaco Summary

Ella takes Padre Fidel Maiz out to the small village of Caacupe. It is renowned for its statue where people leave their jewelry as a symbol of faith. A terrible hailstorm comes in, and the sky turns black. Padre Maiz says it is a sign that they should not have come. Ella makes some comments about beads being equivalent to jewels in the eyes of God. She then strips the statue bare and replaces the valuable jewelry with cheap beads.

A representative from England visits Franco to investigate the claim that many Englishmen are being held against their will. Franco protests, but he doesn't disclose the whereabouts of the Englishmen in question. He finally allows the representative to leave with the families of the Englishmen.

Benigno Lopez has returned from exile and is staying at his mother's, along with his brother Venancio and brother-in-law Saturnino Bedoya. They play whist nearly every afternoon, with various fourth players. One day, Charles Washburn hints to Benigno that he has heard of a plan to replace Franco with his brother. Benigno is shocked and laughs off the rumor.

The Allied army now outnumbers Franco's army by more than two to one. Also, the Paraguayan forces are mostly old men or boys. His troops lack supplies and horses, and they are half starved. Franco doesn't hear this news because his advisers know he doesn't like bad news, and so he hears nothing. He retreats from Humaita with Pancho and takes his troops into the Gran Chaco swamp. It is hard going for the weary troops, and it is dangerous as well. There are poisonous snakes, crocodiles and piranha fish.

Chapter 13: Gran Chaco Analysis

The symbolism of stripping the holy statue of the virgin helps to seal the fate of Franco's army. The sky turns black, and the priest warns that it is a bad omen. Still, Ella persists with her low deed of stealing jewels off of a sacred shrine. She even considers keeping some of the nicer jewels for herself. This act shows the depths that the Lopez family is capable of and their conceit. Their "mission" is even above God. As usual, Ella is able to delude herself that it is for the best, asking what God would want with jewelry anyway.



Chapter 14: San Fernando

Chapter 14: San Fernando Summary

The residents of Asuncion panic when over fifty Brazilian steamers sail up the river towards the city. Charles Washburn and Frederick Masterman watch the Brazilians' progress from the roof of the American Legation. The streets below empty, and both men hope the city will soon fall. Only a small fort with a single cannon defends the city. Still, after a few badly aimed shots, the Brazilians retreat. Washburn is appalled that such a golden opportunity is lost.

Franco's army stops and establishes a new headquarters at San Fernando. It is on a high hill, surrounded by marshes. Women are fighting for his army now, and several work at loading artillery shells. Ella and the children evacuate, first by boat and then overland to San Fernando. The children argue most of the journey, since they were forced to leave their toys behind.

Benigno and Saturnino are arrested for treason and beaten badly. Franco arrives and beats them more, shouting "traitor" and asking questions, but not allowing the semi-conscious men to speak. He holds out a blank piece of paper and tells them that their American friend has betrayed them. The men are too delirious to even read the paper. He furiously calls for the arrest of his sisters.

Chapter 14: San Fernando Analysis

Franco's brothers are naive about the extent of their brother's paranoia. An innocuous remark at a card game that is laughed off and not taken seriously ends up costing both brothers their lives. Whether the rumor about the coup is true or not, it does get back to Franco. In his suspicious state, everyone is a threat, and everyone is out to get him. He doesn't think twice about imprisoning his brothers and assuming that they are guilty. Franco doesn't even give them the chance to explain themselves. His fury controls him completely.



Chapter 15: Pikysyry

Chapter 15: Pikysyry Summary

Charles Washburn feels guilty as he prepares to leave Asuncion on a United States warship with his wife and child. He has not adequately prepared Masterman for the probable arrest that is to come. When arrested, Masterman is beaten and tortured. He eventually implicates Washburn in an Allied plot. He is put in a cell at San Fernando. Many other "traitors" are in the same prison, including Venancio Lopez and Benigno Lopez. Masterman is told that Saturnino has already been shot. The two sisters are also taken prisoner. They are whipped in public, with their dresses pulled over their heads. Inocencia is forced to watch as her husband Vincente is killed in front of her. She screams, "Bastardo! Bastardo!"

Ella sits with all of her children, including Pancho, telling them about Paris. Franco retreats northwards, fighting a slow battle of entrenchment. He has five divisions left, which move upriver to a small village called Pikysyry. Ella and the children are sent out on horseback, accompanied by an American, General MacMahon. While crossing a river by canoe, the children tussle and overturn the whole group. The men manage to get everyone out of the water.

Back at Pikysyry, Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson digs a riverside trench. The men have little ammunition. Overnight, they are overrun by the Brazilians. The Paraguayans retreat to nearby Angostura and hold out for a week. They are under constant bombardment and in a state of confusion. Still, many fight surprisingly well. When the lines finally collapse, some remaining troops give their lives defending the line while Franco flees on horseback. Thompson surrenders shortly thereafter.

Chapter 15: Pikysyry Analysis

The character development is strong in this chapter, as many are killed or flee. The individual characters' composure before death is revealing. Some scream out in anger, and others bicker among themselves, while others quietly accept their fate. Another interesting detail is the character of the regular Paraguayans. Although they were being brutalized by their leaders (and have been brutalized by the past several leaders), they still fight courageously for their country against impossible odds.



Chapter 16: Piribebuy

Chapter 16: Piribebuy Summary

In the quaint village of Piribebuy, Ella almost forgets the turmoil surrounding her. En route, she turns around when one of her servants is shot and ends up defending herself by killing a native Brazilian with her sword. The servant dies, and she barely escapes.

Asuncion is occupied and sacked by the Brazilian army. Houses are gutted, including Obispo Cue. Stoneworker Alonzo Taylor sees Frederick Masterman and Franco's sisters while marching. He talks to a Senora that he knows. Many of the prisoners, including the Senora, are shot in a firing squad. Inocencia and Rafaela are released and soon begin tussling with each other.

Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson has the fortune to board a British vessel shortly after surrendering. He meets up with his brother in Buenos Ayres, and they reminisce about family and the war as they eat.

Franco makes it to Piribebuy and has dinner with General MacMahon and Ella. They sleep together, and he has nightmares - shouting out the names of many family members he has killed. The next day, Franco and Poncho leave for Cerro Leon. En route, Franco recognizes Alonzo Taylor in a prison line and has him released. Alonzo makes it to a British ship and learns his family is safe in Piribebuy. General MacMahon is recalled to Washington.

Ella and her children manage to escape Piribebuy just before the Brazilians overrun the town. Alonzo Taylor's family is less fortunate. As the town is bombarded, they retreat to the church. The soldiers kick down the door and kill Mrs. Taylor along with her two daughters after raping them.

Chapter 16: Piribebuy Analysis

Ella shows a sense of toughness when she kills an enemy soldier in cold blood. Her sword skills, learned earlier in the book, come to good use. The episode affects her, and she remembers the moment for years to come. Considering how many people have died up to that point, either directly or indirectly due to her actions, it is interesting that this personal side of death bothers her. Ella has been insulated from the consequences of her actions up to this point.



Chapter 17: Aquidaban River

Chapter 17: Aquidaban River Summary

Franco escapes with the fall of Piribeby and manages to stay just ahead of the Brazilians for several days. His ragtag army numbers approximately one thousand troops. He drinks heavily, acting impulsively and irrationally. One day, he hands out improvised medals, and the next, he orders random beatings.

Franco drinks himself to impotency, and even Ella cannot arouse him. There is a lightning storm, and she fights to keep their tent upright. Rosaria goes out in the storm to get the children's clothes and is struck by lightning, but she survives. Venancio Lopez, Franco's last surviving brother, dies in a prison cart en route to Curuguaty. Ella is despondent that her aging horse Mathilde is decrepit, nearly a skeleton and covered with sores. She walks with him and strokes his neck.

By the time Franco reaches the Aquidaban River, he is down to two hundred men. Dona Ines manages to forage some grass by the riverside and coaxes Mathilde back to health. Dona rides by as Ella and the children applaud. Then she rides towards the nearest town and doesn't come back. Ella is furious.

The next morning, the Lopez family finds that most of the remaining soldiers have deserted. Franco puts Ella and the children in a carriage and orders Pancho to take care of his mother. Then, he rides along the riverbank. He hears Brazilians shouting. Franco's mule becomes stuck in the mud, and he jumps off and becomes stuck as well. A Brazilian soldier orders Franco to surrender, but he refuses. He is stabbed by several lances and falls backwards into the river.

Chapter 17: Aquidaban River Analysis

In Franco's last action, he again shows his arrogance and stubbornness by refusing to surrender, and he is killed in the process. Would he have been executed if he had been taken into custody by the Brazilians? It is hard to surmise. They might have just killed him, but he also could have gotten off easy, like Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson.



Chapter 18: Paris

Chapter 18: Paris Summary

Ella arrives in France with the children. Shortly thereafter, she leaves for England, just before the Franco-Prussian war. Ella uses the money she has to pay for lodgings and school for her boys, except Pancho, who was killed during their flight from Paraguay. An officer stopped the carriage, and Pancho shot him and then was lanced to death. The troops then forced Ella back to the Aquidaban, where she saw Franco's body in the mud. She and Rosaria dragged him onto dry land, and they covered him with earth.

Dr. Stewart is living in Scotland, but he refuses to return the money Ella has given him. She takes him to court and eventually wins, but Stewart declares bankruptcy before she can receive any money. She sells most of her belongings to keep up her lifestyle. When the war ends in France, she returns. On the train to Paris, she gets out of her seat to chase a man who looks like one of her servants. When she returns, her carry-on luggage is gone. She fortunately still has some of her valuables in her luggage car.

Strolling the streets of Paris, Ella finds that it has changed much from when she was younger. She inquires and learns that Princess Mathilde is in Brussels. She also is dismayed to find that the man who took some of her other belongings to France some months ago has disappeared. Her son Leopoldo becomes sick at school and dies of malaria. She watches Sacre Coeur being constructed outside her window. Princess Mathilde returns to Paris and thinks that she sees her old friend Ella at the opera, but she can't find her afterwards.

Enrique and Carlos return to Buenos Ayres when they are older. They try to claim the property in Paraguay that Ella gave them. Upon arriving in Asuncion, they find the city still in ruins, comprising only a fraction of its earlier population. They are ordered to return to Buenos Ayres.

Ella becomes frail and spends much of her time looking out the window. She calls out to people, thinking they are people she knows. She "sees" the Brazilian soldier she killed, as well as Senora Juliana Martinez. She looks every day for Franco, but she never sees him again.

Chapter 18: Paris Analysis

Ella comes out of her experience relatively unscathed, considering the damage she (and Franco) wrought on Paraguay. There is some conscience in her after all, and she dreams of people who died in the war, including the soldier she killed. In her old age, she misses Franco terribly. He was her true love after all.



Characters

Ella Lynch

A native Irish woman living in Paris who is trying to live an upper class lifestyle without the financial means, Ella is selfish and shallow. She also is always looking for a way to get ahead with the least effort possible. Ella sets her sights on dinner parties and building her palace when she becomes Franco's mistress. She is oblivious to the pain and suffering that Franco causes to the people of Paraguay. She justifies most of Franco's actions, however reprehensible. Having been wronged by Franco's family with Pancho's baptism, Ella is supportive in Franco killing or torturing all of his brothers and sisters.

When the war begins to go badly, Ella considers fleeing with the children and abandoning Franco. Backing down from this, she does make arrangements to send some savings to Europe for safekeeping. Ella is involved with Franco in many decisions. She joins him on the war front for many occasions, staying with him in his headquarters.

Ella has many children with Franco, including two who die at childbirth. She enjoys them in a superficial way. Generally, the wet nurse and servants, instead of Ella, spend day-to-day time with the children. She also has a horse that she considers very important in her life. She becomes so attached that she places her horse's welfare above the welfare of people around her. In Ella's later years, she struggles financially in England and Paris with her family. She moves to Paris and eventually becomes senile, seeing visions of people long since dead.

Francisco Solano Lopez

Son of Don Carlos Antonio Lopez and heir to the Paraguayan Presidency, Franco is a very arrogant, self-centered and sadistic man. As a young but powerful man, he falls in love and is spurned. He goes out of his way to have the woman's fiancy tortured and killed in front of her. Franco also has a habit of punishing innocents when he cannot find the specific person he is looking to punish. He considered it justice. Franco is unstable and has a temper. He also has basically unlimited power, so his temper can literally influence thousands of people. He considers himself a military strategist, although most of his decisions are made emotionally, not logically. This temper sets into course a series of events that eventually leads to his death and the deaths of many of his countrymen.

Franco is a very sexual man. He pleases himself several times a day. Franco is also unattached emotionally to women, and he considers them objects to be used for a specific purpose. Franco meets Ella while in Paris and becomes infatuated with her. They become lovers, and she accompanies him back to Paraguay. Franco has several children with Ella, although technically she is only his mistress, since they never marry.



Franco has an extended family, which he despises for the most part. When his father dies and leaves him with the presidency, Franco immediately takes out retribution on his enemies, including one of his brothers. Franco starts a war with neighboring countries, and through his arrogance and lack of diplomacy, he ends up with three separate countries in league against him. Most of Franco's generals are relatives, not necessarily trained in military tactics. He oversees a campaign and squanders many opportunities, usually through his shortsightedness or his anger. He does have some luck on the battlefield, but eventually, the superior numbers and quality of enemy troops decimate his army. Franco dies on the banks of the Aquidaban River when he refuses to surrender to Brazilian troops.

Juan Francisco Lopez (Pancho)

Juan Francisco Lopez is the first-born son of Franco and Ella. Franco spends much time with his son, who is nicknamed Pancho. Pancho quickly grows to emulate some of his father's sadistic, cruel behaviors, including an incident when he buries his little brother up to his neck in the yard. Pancho begins following his father to his various headquarters, smoking cigars and learning to influence his father's officers, who want to stay in his favor. Pancho also begins the gruesome habit of collecting the ears of enemy troops who had been killed in battle.

While Pancho is fleeing the country with his mother and brothers after his father's death, Pancho kills a Brazilian soldier who recognizes his mother. Pancho is killed by other Brazilian troops in retaliation.

Charles Washburn

Washburn is the United States minister to Paraguay, and he documents many atrocities of Franco's regime and relays the information back to Washington. He speaks to Franco many times about curbing his aggressive actions, to no avail. Washburn also suggests to Franco that his cooperation might bring U.S. military assistance. This tact also falls on deaf ears.

When Washburn realizes that his wife's pregnancy will be high risk, he works successfully to free Frederick Masterman to be his personal doctor. Masterman succeeds in delivering the child, and Washburn is grateful. However, he does feel guilty when he is suddenly recalled to Washington and leaves Masterman without thoroughly preparing him for the likelihood that he will be re-arrested and tortured.

Frederick Masterman

Franco's apothecary general, later promoted to assistant military surgeon, Masterman spends much time inspecting local medical conditions at the hospital in Paraguay. He is appalled at the number of casualties who come in by steamer from the battlefield. He estimates at one point that he has seen over 50,000 dead.



Masterman spends his free time sketching plants and animals for his journal, which serves him well later in England. He is a very naive man who is surprised when Franco has him arrested. He stays with Charles Washburn for a time after his release and helps Washburn's family during a difficult childbirth. He is jailed again in the same facility as the ill-fated Lopez brothers shortly before their deaths. After being tortured to implicate his friend Charles Washburn in a conspiratorial plot, Masterman is eventually released.

After the war, Masterman returns to England, where he writes a book on his seven years in Paraguay. He also teaches many locals about tropical diseases mostly unknown in England.

Dr. Henry Kennedy

Kennedy is an American doctor who has fled to South America in disgrace due to a scandal involving pedophilia in the United States. He has enough medical knowledge to be considered a doctor, but he spends much time distracted by his other pursuit, small boys. Dr. Kennedy will not give up his perversion and finds he can continue his sick lifestyle in South America after being ostracized in the U.S.

Dr. Kennedy becomes involved with Ella when he helps deliver her first child in Buenos Ayres. He travels with her party to Asuncion and becomes a friend of the Lopez family. On an expedition to Lake Ipacarai, he becomes drunk and makes unwanted advances on his young male guide. When rebuffed, he loses balance and hits his head on a rock. His guides, disgusted, take him out to deep water and leave him to die.

Dona Ines

Ella's Spanish instructor, Dona Ines, ends up accompanying her to Paraguay and becoming a household member for years. Dona's father fought and died in the Spanish army, which affects her greatly. Dona is Ella's lady-in-waiting. She marries and becomes distraught after her husband's death in the war. Her mental health declines, and she is repeatedly found wandering about the countryside. Dona becomes pregnant with Baron von Fischer's child while at Obispo Cue, but she ends up miscarrying.

Dona is a religious woman who is often conflicted by her circumstances. As Franco's army collapses and the family goes on the run, Dona helps nurse Ella's prized horse Mathilde back to health, which elates Ella. On a trip into town, Dona does not return with the horse and is not seen again.

Benigno Lopez

Franco's brother Benigno Lopez is held in low esteem by Franco. Once Franco comes to power upon his father's death, he has his brother exiled to an estate far from Asuncion. Later allowed to return, Benigno is falsely implicated in a plot to overthrow



Franco, and he is arrested along with his brother-in-law Saturnino Bedoya. Both men are tortured personally by Franco and later killed.

Don Carlos Antonio Lopez

Franco's father, Don Carlos Antonio Lopez, runs the country of Paraguay under a tightly controlled regime until his death, when his son tightens the reins even more. Don Carlos does not particularly like his son's mistress, Ella. Under the influence of his daughters, who do not like Ella either, he does not assist Franco in persuading the Bishop to baptize Franco and Ella's first child. This results in a bad grudge in the family that ends in bloodshed. Don Carlos gradually cedes power to his son, Franco until his death in 1862. At that point, Franco becomes the undisputed leader of Paraguay.



Objects/Places

Rio de la Plata

Rio de la Plata is the center South American region, including parts of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina.

Buenos Ayres

Buenos Ayres is the capital city of Brazil.

Asuncion

Asuncion is the capital city of Paraguay and home to the Lopez family.

Obispo Cue

Obispo Cue is the palace built to hold Franco and Ella. It is a grand, pink structure made mostly of marble.

Allies / Triple Alliance

The three countries that sign a treaty of war against Paraguay are called the Allies or Triple Alliance. The countries are Brazil, Argentina and Banda Oriental.

Cerro Leon

Franco's staging ground for his war plans is Cerro Leon, approximately fifty miles from Asuncion.

Humaita

The stronghold fort of Humaita is on the Paraguay River south of Asuncion.

Riachuelto

In the river town of Riachuelto, south of Asuncion, the Paraguayan navy moves to capture or destroy the Brazilian fleet. Instead, due to bad planning, the Paraguayan navy is completely destroyed.



Uruguayana

In Uruguayana, a Paraguayan army is slaughtered by Allied forces when its commander foolishly splits his forces in two.

Gran Chaco

The vast, swampy area north of Humaita, Gran Chaco, is filled with dangerous animals and unsurpassable lagoons.

San Fernando

San Fernando is a village on a hill surrounded by swamps. It is used as headquarters during Franco's retreat.

Pikysyry

The hillside town of Pikysyry is where Franco's army makes one of its final stands against the Allied forces.

Aquidaban River

Franco is killed by the Brazilians at the Aquidaban River. He is later buried by Ella on the shore by the river.



Themes

Power, Corruption and Arrogance

Franco and Ella are both superficial people who have no compassion for others. This in itself isn't unusual. When combined with the fact that they happen to rule a country, it suddenly makes a huge difference. Lone psychopaths can only do a certain amount of damage, but the Lopez dictatorship gives Franco and Ella the power to do virtually anything. There is no fairness, since all power emanates from them. Their absolute power eventually comes to affect all citizens of Paraguay. As able-bodied men are killed off, Franco becomes more desperate and widens his terms of conscription to include boys and old men. He truly sees Paraguay's future as being hopeless without him. Calling on thousands of his people to make the ultimate sacrifice for him is acceptable to Franco. Ella is also able to use tunnel vision to ignore the terrible harm that they inflict on Paraguay.

Franco's relatives and cronies staff all the high positions in the government, making for an extremely inefficient system. There are no unbiased staffers to give Franco a realistic view of his position, especially militarily. No one dares tell Franco any bad news. So as far as he is concerned, there is none. This "stick your head in the sand" mentality is not only shortsighted, but it is unintelligent as well. Franco creates his own reality and becomes deluded with his required victory. It escalates to the point where he punishes anyone who tells him bad news. This is so ridiculous that it would be considered amusing, were it not a life or death issue for so many.

Sadism and Violence

Although the mid-1800s, especially in South America, is not the most gentle time in history, Franco still stands out as a very sadistic individual. Many of his traits are passed on from his father, and he in turn passes them on to his son. Franco has many incidents in his formative years that might have led to his behavior. He punishes a dog that looks similar to a dog that bit him as a child. This fits his bizarre notion of justice. He uses this same methodology to kill families of victims and people who truly have no connection to the people he is trying to punish. This hatred, temper and uncontrolled rage end up sending him on a path that will eventually cost him his life.

Franco punishes on a whim in some cases, even if he knows the people he is punishing are innocent. He simply doesn't care. People aren't human to him, and he has no empathy. He also takes pleasure in personally punishing people who he believes have wronged him, like his brothers. He is a true sadist. He doesn't even give members of his own family an opportunity to plead their case or defend themselves.

In many cases, Franco's brutality is condoned to the point where his army routinely rapes, burns and pillages as they conquer their enemies. Enemy troops are shot as they



attempt to surrender. Many others are tortured. Of course, this action comes back to haunt the people of Paraguay, as the Brazilians overrun the city in due course and retaliate in kind. Violence begets violence throughout the story. Franco passes violence down to his son and creates an army of irrational violence. In turn, this generates a violent retaliation, destroying Franco, his son and his country.

Military Strategy

Both sides in the war suffer from lack of good military strategists, Paraguay especially so. Franco foolishly staffs his military with high-level commanders and generals picked, not due to their military background, but due to their personal relations with him. Many of his relatives are handpicked to be his staff, even though they have no military experience. This cronyism combined with Franco's arrogance and micro-managing style causes many bad decisions, which eventually result in Franco's defeat and death.

Basic common sense might have changed the course of many battles. When Franco's troops are located in the fortified position at Humaita, he finds himself sitting in a very good defensive position, on a high, protected hill surrounded by swamps. Instead of making his enemy come to him and be slaughtered on their way up the open hill, which is plausible because many Alliance commanders are as shortsighted as he, Franco becomes impatient and sends his troops out through the swamp. In doing this, he gives up all strategic advantage and wastes many lives in the process.

Franco also rules by fear, which can work well sometimes as a short-term incentive, but which never works in the long run. His staff eventually becomes so afraid of him that they will not give him bad news. When his troops become badly outnumbered, he has no knowledge of the real odds against him.

Franco is also so shortsighted that he pulls all of the able-bodied males into his military, leaving his country's food production abilities crippled. With no farmers left to till the fields, crops rot and food shortages sweep the country. He also has no foresight to supply his men properly. Many troops don't even have shoes in the later battles.

When Franco has a real opportunity to stop the war, he adamantly refuses because it would mean his loss of power. He is not looking out for his people in any way, only himself. A thoughtful, intelligent person could have objectively looked at the odds against winning the war and made a reasonable decision. Franco is in no way reasonable. His arrogance makes him blind to reality.



Style

Point of View

The News from Paraguay is told in the third person. The point of view is mostly that of the main character Ella and her lover Franco. They selfishly see the world revolving around them. Ella's letters (which take on Ella's first-person perspective) show her simple, superficial outlook of her life with Franco. She manages to see the good things around her and revel in them: her beautiful palace, her children and the luxury they live in. Somehow, she is able to either ignore or morally justify the suffering that her husband causes to the people around her. Thousands of people are jailed and killed for no reason. Thousands more starve to death. This does not affect Ella more than momentarily.

Franco's point of view is even more startling than Ella's. The man literally has no sense of right and wrong. He is devoid of conscience or pity. Franco sees himself as the savior of Paraguay. As his situation worsens, he becomes more and more paranoid. Anyone questioning him, even in a constructive way, is seen as the enemy. He settles old or perceived scores ruthlessly and sadistically.

Taken together, Franco and Ella's situation is sad to see. They have the power to do good things, and they instead try and make everyone their enemy. Franco has no capacity to forgive or negotiate in any manner. This ends up sealing his fate.

Setting

Other than the very beginning and end of the story, which take place in Paris, the setting of the story is in South America, mainly Paraguay in the mid-1850s. The main characters move from cities like Asuncion and Buenos Ayres to small villages, like San Fernando. There is urban sophistication and rural simplicity. There is total isolation and contact with the world. There are also many battle scenes, showing trench warfare, navy river engagements, swamp marches and hilltop sieges. There are horrendous places mentioned, like torture prisons and miserable field hospitals. The story details the difficulty of simply moving from place to place in the mostly wild terrain of the South American interior.

In some ways, Paraguay is a tropical paradise for the main characters. It is warm all year round and capable of growing many unique fruits, vegetables and flowers. They plan to import the best of Europe to make it a "South American France," but Paraguay also has another side, just out of the city of Asuncion. These are the wild jungles and impassible marshes. The weather functions in extremes, from floods to drought. The native wildlife includes hazards such as poisonous snakes, crocodiles and spiders, and diseases such as cholera and malaria are always a danger.



Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the story pertain to the shallowness and shortsightedness of the reigning couple, Franco and Ella. The story shows how their split-second, callous and selfish decisions affect those around them. The meaning of a simple decision at the top is shown to drastically affect, and end, lives of innocent people lower in status. At first, these decisions affect only the commoners, but soon, even major characters are affected. Some leave. Some are taken prisoner, and some die.

The real-life struggle of people under a ruthless dictator is played out in detail. As Franco's military situation deteriorates, his decision-making ability becomes worse. His desperate need to win and be recognized by the world as an important leader costs his country dearly. Thousands of lives are sacrificed as Franco's situation becomes more and more hopeless. In a frustrating moment, he throws away a chance to save his people more suffering when he is given the opportunity to make peace. He shows his true selfishness and ego when he spurns peace because it would cost him his presidency.

Ella's true selfishness also becomes obvious at key points in the story. At several times, she is more concerned with the welfare of her horse than with the people around her. She becomes so close to Franco that she identifies with his desire for power. His decline would also affect her, so she generally assists him in any way she can. Like Franco, Ella seems devoid of any sense of morality or pity.

Structure

The News from Paraguay is divided into eighteen chapters. Chapter one introduces both Ella and Franco as they meet in Paris. They fall in love, and Ella agrees to accompany him to Paraguay. Chapter two details their developing relationship and their voyage to Buenos Ayres. Ella finds out she is pregnant with Franco's child. The timeframe of Ella's first pregnancy is described in chapter three. Chapter four details the birth of Juan Francisco, the voyage to Asuncion and the death of Maria. Chapters five and six describe Ella's arrival in Asuncion and the construction of Obispo Cue. The bad blood between Ella and Franco's family also becomes apparent at this time. Franco's rise to power is developed in chapter seven. He makes plans for war with his neighboring countries in chapter eight. Franco declares war in chapter nine and suffers some appalling defeats in chapter ten. Franco shows his bad military decision-making in chapter eleven but does finally get a victory in chapter twelve. His army retreats in chapter thirteen. In chapter fourteen, the Brazilians make a move to capture Asuncion, and Franco has his brothers arrested and beaten. Franco suffers further military defeats in chapter fifteen as he retreats further. Asuncion is occupied by the Brazilians in chapter sixteen. Ella is forced to flee to a nearby town and then flee again as Franco's army falls apart. Ella and Franco spend their last days together in chapter seventeen, before Franco is killed at Aquidaban River. Ella is caught and Pancho is killed in chapter

eighteen. She is released after burying Franco. Ella returns to England and eventually Paris to live out her life.



Quotes

"Oh, how I loathe worrying about money all the time." Chapter 1, pg. 2

"The jails were full of innocent people; he imprisoned and tortured them for no reason, according to his whim. Francia kept Paraguay isolated. No one was allowed to leave or to come into the country." Chapter 5, pg. 55

"...he still manages to keep complete rule over the country and he alone is the supreme judge of every single crime and misdemeanor, no matter how petty. A shocking example of this occurred only a few days ago, when a gentleman who was an acquaintance of mine applied for a passport to go to Buenos Ayres and because something to do with the payment for the stamps is not to his liking he got angry and tore up the passport; the poor man was immediately arrested on President Lopez's orders and, without a trial or any sort of hearing, he was shot!" Chapter 5, pgs. 61-62

"Franco has never been happier. His dream of running the country has come true."
Chapter 7, pg. 82

"Franco's big-gaited mule stood over sixteen hands and was much taller than the native Paraguayan horse...Franco found the mule a challenge and he liked to sit taller in the saddle than anyone else." Chapter 8, pg. 98

"I even reminded President Lopez that the United States might eventually be willing to help him in a war against Brazil, and to furnish him with the tools to do so with greater dispatch." Chapter 9, pg. 115

"A state of war with Paraguay will continue to exist until the abdication of Francisco Solano Lopez." Chapter 10, pg. 121

"Sent to Asuncion from the front by steamer - a journey of at least two or three days - the sick and wounded soldiers received neither food nor medical care. Most of them died on the way and their bodies were thrown overboard before they reached their destination." Chapter 10, pg. 130

"I have no personal ambition. I labor for my country. I will survive or fall with it." Chapter 11, pg. 143

"A victory, I guarantee it." Chapter 12, pg. 148

"Is it true father, that in the eyes of God, glass beads and precious stones have the same value?" Chapter 13, pg. 160

"Mark my word, once the Brazilians take Asuncion, we shall be safe." Chapter 14, pg. 174

"You see, there is no doubt that the man is guilty by association." Chapter 15, pg. 192

"I am writing in regard to the trunk I had sent to you from my home in Paraguay. I am now residing in the city and am eager to recover my belongings." Chapter 18, pg. 235



Topics for Discussion

Is Ella a rich woman in France before she meets Franco? Explain.

Why isn't Ella accepted by the Lopez family?

Describe the escalating actions and reactions between Ella and her two sisters-in-law.

Cite some incidents in Franco's past that might have molded him into the cruel person he became.

Does Ella have compassion, and if so, for whom?

Do Franco's brothers really conspire against him?

Describe the order of battles that Paraguay is involved in.

Cite some bad military decisions that turn the outcome of a battle.

How is Pancho killed?

How many years do Franco and Ella reign over Paraguay?