

Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory

GENDER AND MEMORY IN THE POSTMILLENNIAL NOVELS OF ALMUDENA GRANDES

Lorraine Ryan



Gender and Memory in the Postmillennial Novels of Almudena Grandes

Almudena Grandes is one of Spain's foremost women's writers, having sold over 1.1 million copies of her *episodios de una guerra interminable*, her six-volume series that ranges from the Spanish Civil War to the democratic period; the myriad prizes awarded to her, eighteen in total, confirm her pre-eminence.

This book situates Grandes' novels within gendered, philosophical and mnemonic theoretical concepts that illuminate hidden dimensions of her much-studied work. Lorraine Ryan considers and expands on existing critical work on Grandes' oeuvre, proposing new avenues of interpretation and understanding. She seeks to debunk the arguments of those who portray Grandes as the proponent of a sectarian, eminently biased Republican memory by analysing the wide variety of gender and perpetrator memories that proliferate in her work. The intersection of perpetrator memory with masculinity, ecocriticism, medical ethics and the child's perspectives confirms Grandes' nuanced engagement with Spanish memory culture. Departing from a philosophical basis, Ryan reconfigures the Republican victim in the novels as a vulnerable subject who attempts to flourish, thus refuting the current critical opinion of the victim as overly empowered.

The new perspectives produced in this monograph do not aim to suggest that Grandes is an advocate of perpetrator memory; rather, it suggests that Grandes is committed to a more pluralistic idea of memory culture, whereby her novels generate understanding of multiple victim, perpetrator and gender memories, an analysis that produces new and meaningful engagements with these novels. Thus, Ryan contends that Grandes' historical novels are infinitely more complex and nuanced than heretofore conceived.

Lorraine Ryan is an award-winning lecturer in Hispanic Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK.

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Gender and Memory in the Postmillennial Novels of Almudena Grandes

Lorraine Ryan

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To José, for everything.



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“Motherhood, Clothing and Class in Almudena Grandes’ *Los aires difíciles*.” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 95:1 (2018): 113–131.

“Memory and Masculinity in Almudena Grandes’ *El corazón helado*”, In: Lorraine Ryan and Ana Corbálan’(eds.), *The Dynamics of Masculinity in Contemporary Spanish Culture*. London: Routledge, 2016. 80–96.

“The Gendered Reading Trope in Almudena Grandes’ *El lector de Julio Verne*.” *Neophilologus* 99:2 (2015): 253–269.

Introduction

Almudena Grandes is one of Spain's foremost women's writers, having sold over 1.1 million copies of her *episodios de una guerra interminable*, her six-volume series of historical novels. The myriad prizes awarded to her, eighteen in total, ranging from the 1989 *IX Premio La Sonrisa Vertical* to the 2018 *Premio Nacional de Narrativa* confirm her pre-eminence. Grandes' novels have been translated into many languages and are known to both a non-specialist and a non-Spanish readership; in the Anglo-Saxon world; her best-known novels are *The Ages of Lulú*, *The Frozen Heart* and *The Wind from the East*. This monograph situates Grandes' major historical postmillennial novels – *Los aires difíciles*; *El corazón helado*; and four volumes of *Los episodios de una guerra interminable*: *Inés y la alegría*, *El lector de Julio Verne*, *Las tres bodas de Manolita* and *Los pacientes del doctor García* – within manifold conceptual categories in memory, philosophical and gender studies that illuminate hidden dimensions of her much-studied work. I have selected these particular works because they respond to key and heretofore unanalysed themes in her historical novels, such as perpetrator memory and different aspects of gender memory. More broadly, this analysis seeks to establish Spanish perpetrator memory as a major force in the European canon of cultural perpetrator memory. Premised on a wide-ranging theoretical framework that ranges from fashion studies to psychology, it aims to provide a new insight into perpetrator memory itself, which is demonstrated to be a relational phenomenon, intimately connected with affect, gender, the family, and personal relationships. Similarly, it seeks to challenge defeatist perceptions of victimhood by offering a new vision of the Republican victim as a vulnerable subject who seeks to flourish in inimical circumstances, which causes us to revalorise resilience in studies of victimhood.

Critics have principally analysed Grandes' oeuvre within the prism of Republican memory. It is thanks to academics, such as Sara Fernández Medina, Helena Talaya and Irene Andrés Suárez, whose edited volumes on Grandes have uncovered a wealth of insights into these novels, as well as the single articles of scholars such as Carmen de Urioste, Julia Barnes,

Sebastiaan Faber, Sarah Leggott and Alvin F. Sherman that we have been able to consider Grandes' work within the critical framework of Republican memory, space and exile. A problem particular to this approach is the scant attention paid to the representation of both the victim–perpetrator relationship and the variegation inherent in the perpetrator category in Grandes' novels, which effectively means that the reader can only learn about the consequences of victimisation. Surely, no writer who aspires to represent the post-war period in all its full complexity as Grandes does can omit these issues, as to do so would be to present discrete, heroic and one-dimensional narratives that would deprive the reading public of a comprehensive and fully honed knowledge of the post-war period.

Grandes is generally and, in my view, erroneously, perceived to be a sectarian writer who idealises the victims while condemning the perpetrators: in an interview, Joaquín Leguina criticised that “Grandes solo escribe de la Guerra Civil de forma maniquea” (qtd. in Riaño). This indictment ignores her oft-reiterated desire to convey the more expansive memory of both “héroes y villanos” (qtd. in Aunión) and her stated interest in the ambiguities of perpetration and the conversion of ordinary people into perpetrators. In a 2012 webchat with readers, she declared that “No sólo hubo perdedores en el bando perdedor, y eso lo tengo presente” (Grandes, *El País* 2012). Furthermore, her conceptualisation of evil is not binary and static, but balanced, predicated on an acknowledgment of the difficulties in categorisation. She avers:

Siempre he pensado que un malo para ser malo de verdad tiene que tener luces, porque un malo completamente malo, no asusta a nadie. Es una caricatura. Todos los seres humanos tenemos luces y sombras. Creo que los malos, verdaderamente malos, son aquellos capaces de querer a los demás y tener debilidades. (qtd in Barambio)

She adds: “creo que los seres humanos somos capaces de lo mejor y lo peor, en función de las circunstancias” (qtd. in Barambio). Thus, her novels manifest a considered and diverse engagement with perpetrator memory: *El lector de Julio Verne* is concerned with transforming the perception of perpetrators as reprobates to people with their own credible claims to humanity, who are influenced by social constructs that influence individual attitudes and behavior. Moreover, her redrawing of the perpetrators as the products of a fundamentally weak and corrupted social order in the same novel subverts the certainties that inhere in the easy dichotomisation of evil Falangists versus benign victims. Other novels, such as *El corazón helado*, *Las tres bodas de Manolita* and *Los pacientes del doctor García*, portray the confoundingly arbitrary nature of the individual motives that compel perpetration, as well as the gamut of consequences that arise from these acts. In these novels, the exaltation of the individual victim is complemented by the individualisation of the perpetrator, rendering Grandes' treatment

of memory far more equitable than previously thought. In fact, she is the one Spanish writer who has most engaged with perpetrator memory in her work, developing an original and complex perspective into the issue that transforms cultural perpetrator memory in Spain into a nuanced cultural phenomenon that makes a significant contribution to European perpetrator memory.

In this study, I analyse the gamut of perpetrator memories in her work, ranging from the victim–perpetrator affective relationship in *El corazón helado*, the role of the child, and perpetrator suffering in *El lector de Julio Verne* to the authenticity of perpetrator trauma, the imbrication between medical ethics and perpetration, and the stigmatisation of the perpetrator body in *Los pacientes del doctor García*. My analysis of gender memory is similarly wide ranging, spanning from the imbrication of motherhood and class in *Los aires difíciles* to the memory of the queer city of Madrid in 1930s Spain, and female exile in *Inés y la alegría*. These new perspectives suggests that Grandes is committed to a more pluralistic idea of memory culture, whereby her novels generate understanding of multiple victim, perpetrator and gender memories, an analysis that produces novel and meaningful engagements with these novels. Based on a theoretical framework of vulnerability and flourishing, I also critique the critical conception of the Republican victim as overly empowered in her novels, reimagining victimhood as a more multidimensional experience than heretofore perceived. Overall, I contend that Grandes engages in complex portrayals of victimhood and suffering that undermine those very black-and-white distinctions that critics have, heretofore, identified, a re-evaluation that makes a compelling argument for a more nuanced reassessment of the authoress, and more extensively, disputes the cultural memory boom’s tendency to Manichaeism. In this introduction, I verse on Almudena Grandes’ trajectory and unpack her literary influences, particularly her indebtedness to Benito Pérez Galdós. I proceed to assess the various criticisms leveled at her work and provide new interpretations for the salience of the emotions and agency in her work. I then examine the socio-cultural context of gender and perpetrator memory, outline the theoretical reformulation of the victim in her novels, and, finally, the chapters are summarised.

Almudena Grandes: Trajectory

Almudena Grandes rose to prominence in 1989 with the publication of *Las edades de Lulú*, a *bildungsroman* that chronicled the sexual liberation of the eponymous Lulú under the tutelage of her older lover, Pablo. Despite the novel’s huge success, Grandes refused to become typecast as the high priestess of Spanish eroticism, embarking on a series of novels, *Malena es un nombre de tango*, *Atlas de geografía humana* and *Los aires difíciles*, that cemented her status as one of Spain’s leading women’s writers, a classification that she has virulently rejected: “La escritura tiene género, pero

también edad, nacionalidad” (Grandes, *El País* 2002). Grandes, who was born on May 7, 1960, depicted the lives of professional, liberal, middle-class women living and working in the capital city, Madrid. Their formative years took place during the *aperturista* period when Spain developed into an industrialised and consumer society where the sudden emergence of liberal attitudes coexisted uneasily with the force of traditional mores. They were a generation of women, who, having been inculcated with reactionary dictates, encountered a wide range of personal liberties and professional opportunities available to them when they came of age in the post-Transition period.

From the outset, her novels demonstrated a concern with historical memory: *Las edades de Lulú* memorialised male prison confinement in the 1960s, while *Malena es un nombre de tango* traced a genealogy of maternal dissent from the beginning of the twentieth century. Her 2002 novel *Los aires difíciles* is critically considered to be her hinge novel, a novel that interfuses gender and memory, thus marking her nascent and more substantive commitment to the cultural memorialisation of the Franco dictatorship and Civil War, which officially commenced with the 2007 publication of her *magnum opus*, *El corazón helado*. Grandes’ rewriting of the transgenerational recuperation of memory has made her one of the most prominent members of *el boom de la memoria*, the cultural movement to recuperate the past in Spain, a contentious terrain in which Republican writers narrativise Republican counter-memory, the memory of the defeated Republicans of the Civil War and Franco dictatorship. Grandes was initially motivated to become involved in the movement for the recuperation of historical memory by her daughter’s partisan history books.¹ Perversely, the political manipulation of Republican memory for electoral purposes reinforced Grandes’ commitment, and she has lambasted the state interest in the opening of graves as a cynical electoral ploy (qtd. in Marzo). She reserved her greatest condemnation for the 2007 *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* as she considers that its failure to overturn judicial convictions renders it somewhat pointless: “Si no se van a anular los procesos, no sé de que estamos hablando” (qtd. in Marzo). Grandes opines that the law was an overtly timid measure that was easily overturned by the right-wing Partido Popular (PP), upon their assumption of power in 2011 when they embarked on a process of what she terms *contramemoria*, the dismantlement of the advances made in Spanish memory culture (qtd. in Pigna).

It is important to note the persistence of Grandes’ commitment to historical memory even during the recession period when interest in historical memory waned and when many of her friends dismissed her incipient project, *Los episodios de una guerra interminable*, as a foolish endeavor in the strained economic conjuncture (qtd. in Roldán and Soto). The naysayers’ views reflected the increasing devaluation of historical memory in the recessionary period, when the issue was appropriated by the right to argue that the gravity of the present situation obviated a concern with the past and

that the scarcity of resources made funding destined for historical memory unsustainable. For example, in the midst of debates about the transfer of Franco's grave from *Valle de los Caídos* to his residence, *El Pardo*, PP politician Eduardo González Pons asserted that historical memory did not interest the Spanish populace, who were far more interested in reducing unemployment (*Agencias*). In April 2012, the PP commenced its fiscal abandonment of the recuperation of historical memory. Its first budget reduced the annual amount conceded to the recuperation of memory from 6.2 million to 2.5 million, a drastic cut of 59.6 percent (Herrera). However, Grandes' interest in the issue transcended the altered national mnemonic panorama, for she has always been appalled by the divergence between Spain's inertia in relation to memory politics and the vigorous attempts of other European countries to uncover their past, an abhorrence that compelled her to continue writing about this period (qtd. in Roldán and Soto). For her, the Argentine judge María Servini de Cubría's indictment of Francoist torturers is a shameful reminder of Spain's inability to render national justice (qtd. in Pigna). She also believes that Spain's present and that future are predicated on the past, and she is that morally obligated to restore the memory of "muchos hombres y mujeres que se jugaron la vida para que nosotros tuviéramos democracia y libertades" (qtd. in Sainz Borgo).

Her fictionalisation of the Republicans' alienation marks her as one of Spain's most socially committed writers, dedicated to reinscribing the lives of those who suffered marginalisation, due to their gendered or ideological nonconformity, into the contemporary Spanish psyche. An avowed admirer of the Spanish Second Republic, 1931–1936, she is resolute in her desire to retrieve what she judges to be an era in which Spain was at the pinnacle of its cultural and political prowess (qtd. in Anabitarte 4). The postmillennial novels of Almudena Grandes exemplify the predominant tendency of *el boom de la memoria* to corrode the Francoist vision of monumental history, a metanarrative that has become decidedly passé with the advent of an individualistic postmodernism. Michael Ugarte affirms that "with the end of the twentieth century, Franco (along with the authoritarian culture surrounding him) became somewhat of an enigmatic figure – strange, remotely connected to Spanish identity if at all" (617). His contention hints at the cultural shift that has been caused by the rise of "new history" (Burke 10), centering on the lives of non-elites and also the Spanish desire to extricate themselves from an insular past and position themselves at the vanguard of European progressive nations. These factors combined to create a distinct cultural phenomenon focused very much on the micro-social: it is how ordinary people react to their historically determined circumstances and negotiate the complex and interrelating web of personal relationships, the transformations of the social sphere and its separate units, and individuals' private and often antithetical ideologies which primarily interest the cultural clerisy. This cultural trend is evidenced by films, such as *La lengua de las mariposas*, *Laberinto del fauno* and *Pa negre*; and novels such as Dulce

Chacón's *La voz dormida*, José María Merino's *La sima* and Javier Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina*. For these artists, memory does not constitute a collective category but is instead an eminently subjective, cognitive, and emotional assimilation of key historical events, as a consequence of which the individual Republican is restored to prominence and his/her individual memory is privileged as a site of ideological and personal contestation and negotiation of the dominant memory. History as an explanatory framework has been displaced by memory, which, due to its perceived purity and correlation with authenticity, ethical propriety, and individual subjectivity, is considered a suitable conduit with which to express dissent.² The cultural output of these writers has projected another vision of the conflict and its aftermath into that public sphere, one that has become firmly embedded in the Spanish national psyche.³ It has validated and fortified the civic movement for the recuperation of memory in Spain, lending further credibility to the human rights rhetoric that underpins their struggle. In other words, it instantiates the abstract notions of justice, dignity and inclusiveness, providing readers with an accessible representation of the violation of these principles and the catastrophic consequences for Republican subjectivity in the post-war period.

Grandes has exploited intense marketing strategies and technologies, including book launches; interviews on her publisher Tusquets' website and in the press; and cinematic adaptations of her books *Las edades de Lulú*, *Los aires difíciles*, *Malena es un nombre de tango* and *Atlas de geografía humana*, to increase her book sales and media visibility. Her weekly column in the *El País* Sunday supplement, her frequent televisual appearances in the left-wing Saturday night chat show *La Sexta Noche*, and her weekly column in Ángeles Barceló's radio program *Hoy por Hoy* further bolster public awareness of her work. Her frequent "live chats" with readers of *El País* foment an intimacy between her and her readers, who engage in a new closer kind of relationship with the personable author that further reinforces her left-wing credentials. As one of the maximum exponents of *el boom de la memoria*, this use of marketing has been scrutinised, sometimes harshly by the very same critics who disparage the cultural commercialisation of the memory of the Second Republic and Franco dictatorship (Labanyi 119). As Nathan Richardson ironically muses: "One writes a novel of the Spanish Civil War, and one is a Spanish novelist, or at least a remunerated one" (6). Grandes vehemently rebuts such accusation, arguing that she bucks market trends for shorter novels by producing epic novels that stretch from 500 to 900 pages (qtd. in Siguenza). She also asserts that her novels counter the mediatic tendency to depict the 1940s and 1950s as a glamorous epoch in series such as *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (qtd. in Siguenza). Moreover, she contends that accusations of excessive marketing of cultural memory texts are tantamount to a devaluation of memory itself because they shift the focus to these cultural texts' economic import rather than focusing on their social and political relevance (qtd. in Fernández Medina 31).

Her refutation of venality, however, does not eclipse her extreme savviness in negotiating the Spanish literary market to effectuate immense transformations in the public and critical perception of her. Undoubtedly, Grandes' evolution from the titillating authoress of *Las edades de Lulú*, who posed in her lingerie for photo shoots reporting on the book, to the maximum exponent of historical memory attests to both her ability to prosper in an ever-dwindling market for readers and her attunement to the Spanish literary zeitgeist. The national tributes to her, which range from the naming of a library in Getafe, Madrid, in her honor to the receipt of an honorary doctorate from Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) in 2020, not only affirms her place as Spain's foremost female writer but also testifies to her canniness in dominating a Spanish literary prize terrain that has often been inimical to women writers. Spanish female authors, such as Lucía Etxebarria and Grandes, have frequently been perceived as lacking cultural capital, high-brow intellectual and serious academic engagement, and are more aligned to an inferior commercial capital that gratifies readers through depictions of sentimentality and gratuitous sex.

It is now apposite to briefly examine some of these strategies that have allowed Grandes to maintain both her celebrity profile and her reputation as a serious, politically committed writer. Her veneration of male left-wing authors of the past, who were discredited during the Franco period, is evident throughout *Los episodios de una guerra interminable*, and positions her within a genealogy of male ideological dissent. Grandes explicitly advocates a left-wing stance through the citation of poems by Antonio Machado and Luis Cernuda, even taking the title of her novel *El corazón helado* from one of Machado's poems. The invocation of Machado is consistent with the *boom de la memoria's* exaltation of his work in titles such as Isaac Rosa's *El vano ayer* and Benjamín Prado's *Mala gente que camina*.

However, Grandes' overarching literary influence is the Canarian writer Benito Pérez Galdós: *Los episodios de una guerra interminable* are a patent homage to Galdós's *los episodios nacionales*, forty-six novels written between 1872 and 1912 that fictionalise ordinary people's reactions to historical events. The *episodios nacionales's* unfurling of the fictional lives of Madrid's plebian denizens against a backdrop of tumultuous change inspires Grandes' own focus on the personal and intimate lives of ordinary people. Both Galdós and Grandes committed themselves to writing the fictional micro-histories of highly schismatic times, when national identity was fissured by internal political strife, thus eschewing the focus on "great events and men" to instate a more humane conception of the history of ordinary people. For her, Galdós was the first practitioner of micro-history: "Don Benito nos enseñó a contar desde abajo, nos enseñó que la vida cotidiana de los pequeños españoles era un camino para contar la historia pública de las naciones" (qtd. in Ramos 2019). Her references to his inspiration are constant: on the occasion of the author's birthday, May 10, Grandes always makes a tribute, ranging from an article for the literary magazine *Mercurio* in May 2018 in an edition titled

“Eterno Galdós” to an encomium titled “Viva Galdós” in her column in *El País* in May 2019. The authoress occupied a key position in the Madrid 2020 celebration of the centenary of Galdós’ birth, featuring in an interview on his influence on the current generation of writers in the *Benito Pérez Galdós: La verdad humana* exhibition in the *Biblioteca Nacional*. In her 2020 New Year’s message, she also invoked his sagacity to enjoin her readers to enjoy life’s quotidian pleasures. Thus, Grandes positions herself as a disciple of the master, expressing gratitude for his shaping of her work.

Evidently, the authoress has derived from Galdós not only a background of social ideas that prioritise the *hoi polloi*’s efforts to resist the division, subjugation and terrorism unleashed on them by oppositional forces but also a way of inserting such ideas into novels by intermingling their fictional stories with the real lives of historical figures. It should be noted, however, that Grandes’ idolisation of Galdós is not tantamount to an equalisation with him. The press release for *Inés y la alegría* pictures her sitting at the knees of an aging Galdós’ statue in the Retiro park, an image that is suggestive of a small child learning from a wise grandparent, which represents her as Galdós’ dutiful pupil, devoted to her spiritual and literary master (Ezkerra). This reverence underlies her determination to transform the fallacious perception of him as a “escritor conservador, reaccionario y injusto,” and to redress the ignominious excoriation of him during the Franco dictatorship when the registration details of his birth were removed from the civil registry in Gran Canaria (qtd. in Ramós). In this sense, Galdós resembles many of the ostracised characters that proliferate throughout *Los episodios de una guerra interminable*.

Her alignment with Galdós connects her to a longstanding literary tradition that revered the Canarian author as an inspiration for the literary representation of the marginal subject. His literary legacy has been uniquely intensified during periods marked by national exclusion because of his work’s exquisite representation of intolerance: his 1877 novel, *Gloria*, chronicles a young girl’s infatuation with a Jew, Daniel Morten, which incites unmerited condemnation, while the narrow-mindedness of the eponymous protagonist of the 1876 novel, *Doña Perfecta*, is vindicated by a prelate, a depiction that indicted the Catholic Church. Importantly, both left-wing authors in the Civil War, as well as contemporary writers committed to the recuperation of historical memory, such as Rafael Chirbes and Antonio Muñoz Molina, admired Galdós immensely. In Grandes’ words:

Es muy curioso cómo la generación de la República en ningún momento dejó de amar y de exaltar la figura de Galdós, el ejército popular en las trincheras repartía ediciones populares de los Episodios Nacionales. Alberti editó a Galdós en Argentina, Cernuda escribió este poema, Max Aub escribió *El laberinto mágico* siguiendo el modelo de los Episodios Nacionales. (qtd. in Pacíos)

Their respect for him recuperates an author whose memory has been alternatively idealised and vilified. Galdós was memorialised as a national hero

through monuments, memorabilia, curricula and an enormous state funeral in 1885. His defining image as a white-bearded patriarch was quickly imprinted upon the national consciousness. However, he was ostracised by Franco, and in the 1970s, he was regarded by the *intelligentsia* as a somewhat irrelevant, provincial writer who was not compatible with democratic Spain's embrace of internationalism. In the postmillennial period, Galdós' ascendancy as a writer and his status as an early public intellectual make for commanding signifiers of Spanish prestige while also paradoxically symbolising marginality. Therefore, these postmillennial writers espouse both the incontestably prestigious and marginalised Galdós.

Both Grandes' own self-created association with Galdós, and its critical approval by noted critics, such as Fernando Valls, have associated her with an unimpeachable literary pedigree that has imbued her historical novels with an uncontestable credibility. Indeed, the 2011 *Premio Poniatowska de Novela's* award statement eulogised *Inés y la alegría* as "una obra narrativa, montada en la tradición galdosiana" (EFE). In a literary landscape where female writers often confront the obstacles of a deeply entrenched sexism and stereotyping (Henseler 24), Grandes' forging of this connection positions her, not unproblematically, in the canon of venerable male authors, disarming detractors who would dismiss her as a mere "women writer" or "feminist writer."

Although Grandes has professed her admiration for female writers, such as Carmen Martín Gaité and Ana María Matute, she seems to accept and work within rather than contest the centrality of phallogentric literary traditions that have impeded the articulation of the authentic female voice, a discrepancy that has two mutually opposing causal explanations. Firstly, the particular nature of Spanish post-feminism illuminates this caution. Spanish post-feminism equates a diluted form of feminine self-realisation with professional success, physical perfection and complete individualism, with no attendant scrutiny of the collective constraints that hinder an individual woman's self-fulfillment. It is premised on an antipathy to the idea of "feminism," held to be a man-hating, *passé* movement that holds no relevance for contemporary Spanish women (Hooper 72). In an interview with Yemini Pollini, Grandes reveals elements of this attitude, displaying a fundamental misunderstanding of feminism as a movement that encourages self-victimisation (352). In line with Spanish post-feminism, she abhors the contextualisation of women's writing within a limited historical conjuncture, which qualifies the extent of their achievement.⁴ In so doing, she manifests an ahistorical belief in the boundlessness of female progress. We can conclude that she regards the historically longstanding male dominance of the Spanish literary tradition as inexorable, and that the classification of female writers only serves to perpetuate their dominance by isolating women writers in an "inferior" literary category.

It may also be attributable to a desire not to alienate male readers and to mark a distance from her reputation as a women's writer, in the earlier

part of her career, a moniker that was constantly rebutted by her. In a 2017 interview, she seems to rejoice at her increased number of male readers. She stated:

Es verdad que, al principio, tenía muchas más lectoras que lectores. Y, sin embargo, escribir sobre la memoria ha acercado mis novelas a los hombres. A las mujeres les gusta la ficción pero la memoria histórica interesa más a los hombres. (qtd in Arjona)

This is a dichotomous generalisation that both privileges male readers and fails to take into account the resonance her novels' have for her loyal female readers. Ironically, however, the influence of Galdós enriches both Grandes' writing and stature enormously by helping her to overcome the dilemmas inherent in female authorship and, simultaneously, to obtain awards previously inconceivable for female writers. Upon the concession of the *Premio Nacional de Narrativa* in 2018, which heretofore had only been awarded to seven women in comparison to sixty-eight men, Grandes stated her fervent desire that this gender disparity would be rectified in the future (qtd. in Aunión). In this regard, her achievements are paving the way for gender parity in Spain's cultural institutions that previously associated women with low-brow literature in contrast to putatively male and more literary meritorious writing (qtd. in Aunión).

The use of testimony, the featuring of real-life historical figures, ranging from *La Pasionaria* to the Nazi Hans Lazar, and her collaborations with historians have further cemented her status as a serious writer of historical fiction. Firstly, Grandes' own academic training as a historian in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid endows her with professional-level knowledge to explore these topics and to establish relationships with witnesses. Her use of the testimonies of survivors, such as Isabel Perales, a child exploited in a convent in Bilbao, and her recourse to Juana Doña's testimony, *Querido Eugenio*, in her 2014 novel, *Las tres bodas de Manolita*, validates her status even further, as she recuperates the voices and traumatic experience quelled through dominant state, academic, cultural or literary discourses. As Olga Bezhanova astutely notes, the use of testimony, prevalent in *el boom de la memoria*, gives the narrative a veneer of substance that enhances the readers' engagement with the text (63). These testimonies expose the brutality of dictatorship and the legacy of "la muerte civil," the social exclusion of the Republicans from civil society in the post-war period, revealing the alienation and isolation of vulnerable subjects who strive to discursive their memory and to obtain recognition for their suffering.

The inclusion of testimony is at once a manifestation of Grandes' redemptive ethics that reconverts both reader and writer into witnesses of traumatic experiences. In their study, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, literary theorists Shoshana Felman and Dora Laub verse on the importance of witnessing testimonies of trauma. This

witnessing, which can be defined as the acknowledgment of the traumatic occurrence, involves empathetic emotional responses or verbal and non-verbal expressions that acknowledge the weight and importance of the stories told. Primo Levi recalls a German guard gloating to prisoners that, in the case of their survival, nobody would believe their stories because of their absolute inconceivability (67). Frequently, this incredulity derives from the gap between the idiosyncratic and institutional idiom of abuse and an articulation of the victims' plight that appeals to the general public. Testimony preserves trace elements of memories that have been eradicated, proving to be, in the words of Ariel Dorfman, "a very concrete form of reiterating their ethical superiority" (137), and the fictionalisation of this testimony engenders memorability, the ability to engage the public with this memory (Rigney 13). The reappearance of the same historical figures and places in the novels is another feature that strengthens the bond between Grandes and her readers. Antonio Ochoa, the stern adoptive father figure of *Los aires difíciles*, re-emerges in *Los pacientes del doctor García* as the aspiring boxing trainer of Adrián Ortega Gallardo. Similarly, there are allusions to Pepé el Portugués in *Las tres bodas de Manolita* and *Inés y la alegría*. The inclusion of these characters in the texts engenders a sense of community and, importantly, a temporal continuity that facilitates the imaginative entry into the past by fomenting the readers' connection with characters, who by virtue of their constancy, are personalised for them.

Perpetrator and Gender Memory

Grandes' engagement with perpetrator memory is somewhat paradoxical, as why does such a putatively Republican authoress delve into perpetrator memory? In the transformed mnemonic universe of postmillennial Spain, Nationalist memory gives more cause for shame than pride because it is devoid of the social kudos now generated by Republican victimhood and the cultural memorialisation of same. This surge of Republican memory diminished a previously unassailable Nationalist social and cultural capital that had been on the wane since the transition to democracy. To wit, during the resurgence period, 1999–2007, the proponents of Republican memory gained public acceptance and even kudos, while the descendants of Francoist supporters were subject to a deluge of criticism that articulated the social unacceptability of their memory. The enormous success of the revisionist historian Pío Moa's 2005 pseudohistorical apologia of Nationalist culpability, *Los mitos de la guerra civil*, and the vehemence of the November 20 demonstrations in *el Valle de los Caídos* manifest the persistence of a pro-Francoist side, which begs the question: how do their families rationalise their forefathers' suspected implication in atrocities, skulduggery, indifference or incidental profiting from the Francoist victory?

The eruption of the so-called *guerra de las esquelas* (War of the Obituaries) in the principal Spanish newspapers, *El Mundo* and *El País*, in August

2006 reflected the fury of the Nationalist generation of grandchildren who believed that their forebears were being unjustly vilified. The publication of an obituary honoring the Republican aviator Virgilio Leret provoked a storm of counter-obituaries eulogising the Nationalist dead in a politically incendiary language, redolent of Civil War cant: terms such as “the Marxist hordes” and “Soviet Spaniards” reawakened bellic polarisations (Fernández de Mata 89). The latter possibility has a particularly personal resonance for Grandes, who hails from an ideologically polarised family, in which the communist, socialist and fascist members did not speak to each other for the duration of the Civil War (Crespo Buiturón 227). It was in the family itself that Almudena Grandes learned that Nationalist affiliation was not tantamount to callous mistreatment of others and unethical behavior, for her grandfather, a fervent Nationalist, who secured a sinecure in the *Ministerio de Regiones Devastadas* in the post-war period, resigned from his post in silent protest at the toleration of corruption within the ministry (Crespo Buiturón 229). Thus, Grandes’ successful representation of the filial negotiation of perpetrator memory in *El corazón helado* and *El lector de Julio Verne* mirrors her own reconciliation of her abhorrence of Nationalist misdeeds on the macro-social level and a personal respect for her honorable grandfather, a divergence that imbued her with a respect for diversity within the perpetrator category.

Grandes’ implication in perpetrator memory can also be ascribed to the universal and national recognition of its relevance in the recuperation of memory. Theorists concur that a one-sided focus on victimhood is detrimental to the maturation of a pluralistic memory culture. In his seminal article on perpetrator memory, Richard Crownshaw notes that perpetrator memory, defined as the exploration of the memory of people involved in acts of repression and violence, counters the overemphasis on the victim, which conceals the complicated processes of large-scale national involvement in reprehensible crimes. He decries the dismissal of the perpetrator in our confrontation with the past because he believes that it excuses us from understanding the quotidian normative circumstances that convert normal people into perpetrators (78). Jonathan Dunnage concurs, noting that the “public reconstructions of the past according to victim–perpetrator/good–evil absolutes often fail to take account of the rather more blurred dynamics behind oppressive state rule and acts of atrocity” (92). The equation of the memory of victimhood with the recuperation of memory displays a very narrow grasp of what an inclusive memory culture entails. Offe warns that the memory of victimhood will not automatically transform the cultural values, attitudes and behavioral patterns that have been cultivated under the old regime: only the incorporation of both memories of victimhood and perpetration will create a more heterogeneous and inclusive society (197). Memory is concerned not only with suffering but instead with social, ethical and pedagogical issues, such as generating knowledge about the causes of acts of atrocity.