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Doctoral Thesis

Representations of Trauma în Almudena Grandes' literature

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Summary

Keywords: Spanish Civil War, trauma, postmemory, memory recovery, Francoist dictatorship, contemporary Spanish novel.

The interest in Spain's tumultuous past has become almost obsessive, especially after the year 2000, following the discovery of mass graves from the Spanish Civil War in Priaranza del Bierzo. The numerous novels and investigations published in recent decades are a clear proof of this interest, which has transformed this interest, according to some critics, into a kind of literary fashion. Our study focused on the literary and journalistic creation of the writer Almudena Grandes, one of the most important voices of contemporary Spain, remarkable for the constant interest shown in recovering the significant events of the last century.

The first chapter of our investigation provided a contextualization of the levels of current Spanish society, related to both the Spanish Civil War and Francisco Franco's dictatorship. We have then followed the footsteps of a Transition to Democracy, today strongly contested. Thus, we marked the numerous changes that reconfigured the new democratic society, along with which we also presented the difficulties that it encounters in receiving its own past. In order to obtain a clearer perspective on how these events are transposed into literature, we presented some considerations on the study of memory, followed by representations of the recovery of historical memory in the Spanish context. Then we discussed the fictionalization of the Civil War.

In addition to this subchapter, our investigation captured the "literature of the vanquished", where we focused on writing from exile, opposed to the regime installed by Franco. The next subchapter of our study presented the coordinates of feminist literature, analyzing both the timid attempts of writing under censorship and the thematic exploration that took place during the Transition period. Last but not least, we dealt with sketching the new generation of writers who recover the theme of war, noting a series of its unifying characteristics. The past becomes obsessive, and remembering it is liberating after the silence imposed by the Transition.

Next, our approach aimed at the coordinates of the postmodern novel in relation to the Spanish space and to the writer Almudena Grandes. Thus, the introduction we made to the author's biography and literary production allowed us to delimit her writing into two major stages: that of sexual liberation through her debut novel, *Las Edades de Lulú* (1989), and that which targets the tumult of family and professional life through the novel *Atlas de geografía humana* (1998). The following subchapters followed the trajectory of Almudena Grandes from the perspective of a journalist concerned with the social themes least discussed in the public space. Her commitment to historical memory, gender issues and political injustices, expressed throughout her decades-long collaboration with the newspaper *El País*, transformed her into one of the most important voices of Spanish society, campaigning for the defense of a history that few remember today.

Almudena Grandes' first journalistic contributions, gathered in *Mercado de Barceló*, include articles of the most varied kind. Our study focused on those that discuss social problems and to which Grandes drew attention on countless occasions. The same directions were identified and analyzed in the following publication that brings together a new series of articles, *La herida perpetua: El problema de España y la regeneración del presente*, where the author brings to the fore a series of problems or shortcomings of current Spanish society in order to urge her readers to reflect and take a stance. The third chapter is dedicated to the "prose of the marginalized", the author choosing to dedicate her literature to categories that seem to have lost out to society. This assumption is evident not only through the prism of her journalistic articles, but also through the novels published over time. The X-rays that Grandes made of society assumed the perspective of the defeated, of those whom society forgot or left behind.

Our study also focused on the ideological nature of the author's writing, her preference for the narrative perspective of republicans, those in the midst of antifranquist resistance. This discourse complemented the positions the author has taken over time in her editorial contributions, allowing our research to trace how the Spanish author's literature becomes a space for the liberation of the silenced. We then turned our attention to the novel *El corazón helado* (2007), the author's first publication in which themes such as the recovery of historical memory, antifranquist resistance, and the trauma of exile for republican families who left the country after the war are introduced.

The final part of our investigation was dedicated to revisiting the traumatic events of the past through the lens of Almudena Grandes. Our approach was introduced by a theoretical subchapter based on trauma research conducted by theorists such as Dominick LaCapra, Slavoj Žižek, Cathy Caruth, Ignacio Martín

Baró, and Meera Atkinson, to understand the effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. The installation of Franco's dictatorship immediately after the Spanish Civil War left no room for mourning, and the silence surrounding past events after the dictator's death only deepens this imposed forgetfulness from decades ago. Thus, literature not only serves to bring past events into the present, but also helps process the installed trauma, confronting individuals with it to begin the long-delayed healing process.

Building on the above, our study explored the representation of trauma in the series of novels *Episodios de una guerra interminable*. Drawing on the ideas of the theorists already discussed, we explored the multiple ways individuals experience trauma: interior or exterior exile, psychological trauma felt by both victims and some of the perpetrators, physical and sexual abuse, and the stealing of children during the regime. Almudena Grandes' novels do not claim to heal these traumas, but rather to force the recovery of an uncomfortable past, which many still try to keep buried. As we saw at the end of each novel in the series, although the traumatic events remain present in the characters' consciousness, there is hope for healing the traumas of the past in the present, only after the victims of the regime have received recognition, and the mourning period has ended.

Therefore, the study we undertook aimed, on the one hand, to analyze how contemporary Spanish literature fictionalizes the Civil War, and, on the other hand, to explore the ways in which trauma is represented in Almudena Grandes' writing. Our investigation first focused on the changes that took place on multiple levels of society and then centered on the connection between history and literature. The choice of Almudena Grandes was not incidental, given her commitment to the republican cause and the recovery of memory.