

# Memory and Masculinity in Almudena Grandes's *El corazón helado*

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**MEMORY AND MASCULINITY IN ALMUDENA GRANDES'S *EL CORAZÓN******HELADO*****Lorraine Ryan*****University of Birmingham, UK*****Introduction**

This article focuses on the under-researched, yet hugely significant, rise of the Spanish new man, who is constituted by a male subjectivity premised on ethical probity, intellectual rationality, left-wing values, hypermodernity, and a misidentification with patriarchal values. This new man is an aggregate of the permutations in Spanish gender ideology in democratic Spain which encompass the widespread incorporation of women into the workplace, the legalization of homosexuality, and the ever-accelerating secularization of the populace. In this article, I analyze this social phenomenon in Almodena Grandes's 2007 magnum opus, *El corazón helado*. In so doing, I reconceive the protagonist Álvaro's affiliation with his grandmother's memory, which, thus far, has been interpreted as a literary representation of "la generación de los nietos" [the generation of grandchildren's] mobilization to dignify their grandparents' memory (de Urioste 74).

In this article, I re-read Álvaro's recuperation of his grandmother's memory as a process of historically gendered self-discovery that reaffirms the contemporary configuration of masculinity, constituted by the repudiation of patriarchal values, the emergence of the new man, and women's assumption of hegemonic masculinity. Based on a masculine studies theoretical framework, my analysis proposes that Álvaro's reverence for his grandmother's memory is the outcome of a gendered process of identity work, spurred by a foundering father-son relationship and a subsequent yearning for a gender precedent that resonates with his own version of "feminist masculinity", which he finds in the memory of his grandmother's performance of female masculinity. As part of my analysis, I postulate that

Almudena Grandes challenges normative versions of masculinity in three strategic ways: the deconstruction of the Francoist patriarchal model of fatherhood; a comprehensive exploration of postmillennial Spanish feminist masculinity; and the revindication of female masculinity during the Second Republic as well as a contemporary autonomous, highly sexual variation of Spanish womanhood, symbolized by Raquel. Prior to embarking on my re-reading, I will analyze the literary response to perpetrator memory in Spain, and outline the masculine studies framework undergirding my ensuing analysis.

### **Gender and Nationalist Perpetrator Memory**

*El corazón helado* chronicles the investigation by a middle-aged son, Álvaro Carrión Otero, into his father's past and his simultaneous discovery of a courageous Republican grandmother and the illicit enrichment of his father, Julio, during the postwar period; this dualistic narrative structure has been construed as the polarization of memory and history respectively (de Urioste 78). These separate thematic strands eventually converge in the form of a passionate love affair between Raquel Fernández Perea, the grandchild of the exiled Fernández Muñoz family, and Álvaro, the son of Julio Carrión, the expropriator of the exiled family's property. This 2007 novel's chronicling of the complexity of a filial confrontation with a morally dubious past aims to expand the Spanish post-millennial mnemonic community, which had, in 2007, become defined by an idealization of Republican victimization and a concurrent excoriation of the Nationalists. The surge of Republican memory in the late 1990s diminished a previously unassailable Nationalist social and cultural capital, which 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.<sup>1</sup> Grandes's successful representation of a son's negotiation of admiration and the adult discovery of his

father's chicanery in *El corazón helado* mirrors her own reconciliation of her abhorrence of Nationalist misdeeds on the macro-social level, and a personal respect for her honorable grandfather. It was in the family itself that Almudena Grandes learnt that Nationalist affiliation was not tantamount to callous disregard for others and unethical behavior, for her grandfather, a fervent Nationalist, who secured a sinecure in the *Ministerio de Regiones Devastadas* in the postwar period, resigned from his post in silent protest at the toleration of corruption within the ministry (Crespo Buiturón 229).

Interestingly, *El corazón helado* forms part of a growing number of novels, which include Javier Marías's 1992 novel *Corazón tan blanco*, Rafael Chirbes's 1994 novel, *Los disparos del cazador*, Bernardo Atxaga's 2004 novel, *El hijo del acordeonista*, Almudena Grandes's 2012 novel *El lector de Julio Verne* and Andrés Trapiello's 2012 novel, *Ayer no más*, that address the intricacies of male descendants' confrontation with their progenitors' malfeasances in the postwar period. These novels crystallize the construction and perpetuation of the inequitable system of social and economic privilege sanctioned by the Nationalist victory, and the sons' consequent disarticulation from this dubious paternal morality. The father-son relationship has historically occupied a superior gendered position as a bond presumed to be crucial to the maintenance and perpetuation of male dominance, and hence, its fracturing denotes the destabilization of patriarchal dominance in contemporary Spain. In this corpus, the recurrence of morally unscrupulous and status-hungry fathers deideologizes the Spanish Civil War and *el primer Franquismo*, the early postwar period from 1939-1957, reconceiving them, in novels such as *El hijo del acordeonista* and *El corazón helado*, as periods when the arbitrary application of the rule of law facilitated the illegal expropriations of Republican properties. In these novels, three sons, Álvaro in *El corazón helado*, José Pestaña in *Ayer no más*, and Nino in *El lector de Julio Verne*, are university professors, while David in *El hijo del acordeonista* is an architect. Evidently, all

these professions represent the sons' alignment with a rational intellectual model of masculinity that transmutes their progenitors' ill-begotten wealth into respectable bourgeois capital.

The father-son relationship is also invested with a specifically gendered import that contains the potential to enhance our understanding of the transmission and reception of postmemory, while concurrently adding historical depth to periods represented in traditional historiography as exclusively male, oriented toward the obtainment of power, and unrelated to the affective, familial, and emotional.<sup>3</sup> In her seminal study, *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch stresses the importance of gender in analyzing memory: “We should be interested in looking at gender precisely where it recedes to the background, when it appears to be elusive or even invisible. It is in this context that gender itself becomes a point of memory offering insights into how memory functions and it is transmitted” (179).

Memory functions in terms of present gendered and ethical expectations, and changing individual priorities (Ryan, 156), and in this vein, *El corazón helado* provides an interesting insight into the mapping of transformed gender norms onto the recuperation of memory in current-day Spain. The distinctiveness of Grandes's conflation of memory and masculinity resides in its reconstruction of masculinity as performative and subjective. The founder of masculinity studies, R.W. Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as constituted by the domination of other men, bearers of what she terms “subordinate masculinities”, and women. Enlarging on masculinity's misogynistic and homophobic overtones, Connell stresses that the feminine or even its intimation is virulently rejected by men, whose very manhood is staked on non-femininity (25). Adrienne Rich concurs, defining patriarchy as “a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men, by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, traditions, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere

subsumed under the female” (57). Connell’s theorization has been critiqued for its omission of the work of Judith Butler on the performativity of gender. Following Butler, Stephen Whitehead asserts that the malleability of gender necessarily means that hegemonic masculinity can be performed by a woman (58). Furthermore, theorists have lamented her inability to imagine “more egalitarian forms of masculinity” (Wedgewood 333), and to factor in men’s affective needs.<sup>2</sup>

Departing from this theoretical basis, I examine the present and historical configuration of gender in the form of the new man, the performance of hegemonic masculinity by Raquel, and Álvaro’s grandmother’s performance of “female masculinity” during the Second Republic. In so doing, I argue that Álvaro’s obsession with his grandmother’s memory is a product of a distinctly gendered search for a memory consistent with his feminist masculine identity, which accepts the hegemonic masculinity of a woman, Raquel, in the contemporary period, and the “female masculinity” of his grandmother, during the Spanish Second Republic, 1931-1936.

### **The Father-Son Relationship in *El corazón helado*.**

At the mid-life juncture in which he finds himself at the commencement of *El corazón helado*, the protagonist Álvaro wallows in self-loathing, despising his everyman status as “el español mediocre” [a mediocre Spaniard] (62), a feeling of insecurity only exacerbated by the shadow of his formidable father: “Mi padre era un hombre mucho más extraordinario de lo que hemos llegado a ser sus hijos” [My father was a much more extraordinary man than his sons] (69, 190); “mi memoria le registra como a un ser único, íntegro, y sin fisuras” [I remember him as an exceptional, complete and flawless person] (82). Indeed, Julio’s predilection for performing magical tricks for them as young children invests him with a superhuman quality, as “el mago, el encantador de serpientes” [the magician, the snake-charmer] (190). Sarah Leggott posits that Grandes’s portrayal of Julio’s entertainment of his

children “reveals a human side to a father that could be cast as a villain in many accounts” (125), thus counteracting the manicheism of much of the *boom de la memoria* narrative. However, his penchant for magic, a talent synonymous with hoodwinking and falsity, signals his fundamental untrustworthiness, and further intimates his disinterest in forging a genuine bond with his children. Ironically, Álvaro’s reverence of his father stems from Julio’s unknowability and disengagement from his family; Julio is patently disinterested in the emotional component of his fathering role, performing it in his son Rafa’s words “cuando le daba la gana” and never attending his daughter Clara’s musical recitals (Grandes 265). Traditionally in Western cultures, boys have a distant and emotionally remote relationship with their father, who is respected as the breadwinner and disciplinarian. In the words of Nancy Chodorow: “The father rarely plays a major caretaking role. In most societies, his work and social life take place farther from the home than do those of his wife. He is, then, often relatively inaccessible to his son” (34). The divergence between the son’s emotional needs and the father’s emotional inarticulacy “promotes an emotional disconnectedness between father and son, but it emphasizes a false sense of gender differences that are constraining, in profoundly different ways, for men and women” (Willis 26).

The protagonist’s extolment of his father is not only a function of the emotional breach between them, but can also be attributed to the inadequacy of familial memory within the home. Julio’s self-aggrandizing references to the past allude only to his putatively glorious war feats as a soldier in *La División Azul*, the Francoist military contingent sent to Nazi Germany to aid Hitler in his fight against Stalinist Russia (Grandes 14). Álvaro’s meagre knowledge of his father is constructed from typically bland family photos of “la familia numerosa” [large family], and his father donning a *División Azul* uniform in Poland (62, 71). These photos allegorically symbolize the nationally legitimized variants of postwar Francoist masculinity, the patriarch and war-hero. Tellingly, they reveal the rigidity of the

social construction of masculinity in highly patriarchal societies, such as Franco's Spain, where men's behavior had to conform to an inflexible "performance on a preset stage, leaving only a few directions to be followed" (Benyon 2002). Moreover, they underscore the familial adherence to National Catholicism, as the Francoist state glorified large families in order to reverse the declining birth rate, which they fallaciously attributed to the Malthusian social policies of the Second Republic (Nash 289). If assessed on a more profound level, these images are further revelatory of the hypocrisy underpinning the family image in Franco's Spain, and in particular, the patriarchal role. The war photos convey the notion of a distinguished war career, and enhance the aura of virility surrounding Julio Carrión, who we later find out is simply a disreputable opportunist, having been simultaneously a member of both the *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* (JSU) and the Falange. The exposure of Julio Carrión's duplicity shatters the postwar artifice of masculinity, edified upon military prowess and an impervious paternal role. Thus, Grandes's counternormative depiction of the traditional family unit debunks the myth of a Francoist society founded on morally sound family values.

The third-person narrative that recounts Julio Carrión's brilliant economic trajectory, his rise from humble origins to great wealth, posits the Franco Dictatorship and *apertura* era as periods of social mobility, when ambitious men like him could finally prosper. Julio is representative of an inequitable configuration of power, affluence, and masculine respect that originates in the unjust postwar redistribution of Republican property and wealth, sanctioned by laws such as the 1939 *Ley de Responsabilidades Políticas* [Law of Political Responsibilities], which ratified the illegal expropriation of Republican property. Francoist masculinity, epitomized by bullfighters, such as *El Cordobés*, was anchored in an impressive masculine physicality and seductiveness. It was representative of what bell hooks terms "the aggressive dominator model of patriarchal masculinity", which is calibrated by capital

acquisition, drive, and feminine conquests (27). Julio's choice of wife is noteworthy on two counts. Firstly it is consonant with a generic self-made variant of masculinity, which seeks to expunge its unseemly origins by marrying well, a process that converts "Mr Van Rough into Mr Smooth" (Kimmel 86). In another vein, the marriage reinforces the economic consolidation of the Nationalist victory, and the persistence of male hegemony in the industrialized *apertura* period: Angélica, the niece of the Muñoz Fernández family whose property Julio illegally obtained, is a blonde beauty, who is described by her son as "la sueca imaginaria" [the imaginary Swede] (21). In the 1960s, *las suecas*, [the swedes], the bikini-clad female tourists who flocked to Spanish beaches, became objects of sexual fantasy for Spanish men, who imagined them as the libertarian sexual other (Crumbaugh 11). Although Angélica physically incarnates a potentially disruptant foreign sexuality, she is, in fact, only a suitable reflection of her husband's elevated social status, whose comportment adheres to the sexually conservative female archetype still prevalent in the *apertura* period. The very name, Angélica, invokes the "ángel del hogar", the asexual and docile prototype of womanhood propagated by the Francoist Regime. Throughout the novel, Angélica fulfills an ornamental function, her beauty inciting admiration for Julio, while she passively tolerates his infidelities (Grandes 171).

Significantly, Julio, the patriarch *par excellence*, achieves a principally economic ascendancy over other men. Álvaro comments that his affluence distinguished him from his former friends from Torrelodones who attended his funeral (15). Grandes' chronicling of his financial skulduggery, the diminution of his sexual prowess, and the onset of senescence, undermines the patriarchal archetype of Francoist manhood. Adolfo, Álvaro's brother-in-law, confirms his suspicions that Julio was using Viagra in his dotage, which may have provoked his heart-attack (187). The use of the drug can be construed as an individual response to the feared loss of his physical and social seductiveness which underwrote his success with

women. Markedly, the character of Eugenio Sánchez Delgado, Julio's war-time friend, serves as a counterfoil to Julio's masculinity, and prefigures the contemporary recuperation of memory. Eugenio is clearly inspired by Grandes's grandfather, insofar as he too hails from a Fascist family, and renounces his well-paid position in a ministry, which required him to oversee the expropriation of Republican properties, a task he judged to be unconscionable (734). Implicitly reproaching Julio for his fraudulent dealings in the postwar period, Eugenio categorically declares the wrongness of the legalized expropriation of republican property: "Eso es robar, Julio. Aunque haya una ley, aunque sea legal, aunque lo haga todo el mundo. Y por ahí no paso" [That is robbery, Julio, although there may be a law, although it is legal, and although everybody does it. I don't go there] (736). Grandes's characterization of Eugenio attests to her nuanced understanding of the variability of Francoist masculinity in Spain, which included disillusioned Francoist stalwarts who found their integrity compromised by the Regime's institutionalization of repression.

The omnipotence of patriarchy does not mean that the successful reproduction of masculinity is an *a priori* given. Masculinity should not be considered a static, unchanging entity, but an evolving, constructible one, constituted and reconstituted by what Stephen Whitehead has termed "identity work", which he defines as "the imminent search for existence and being male/man, the subject engages with and works on the historically and culturally mediated codes of masculinity that prevail around it" (216). Whitehead's theory means that socialization in the dominant gender norms does not equate to an automatic acceptance of these same norms. Enlarging on this possibility, bell hooks writes: "patriarchal culture is the system men were born within and socialized to accept, yet in all areas of their lives most men have rebelled in small ways against the patriarchy, and have resisted absolute allegiance to patriarchal thinking and practice" (108).

Despite his self-deprecation and patent inferiority complex in relation to his father, Álvaro embodies a shift in patriarchy, personifying a far more nurturing, ethical model of masculinity. Instead of being consumed by the disparity between them, he finds worth in an immersion into the intellectual realm, which acts as an explicit repudiation of his father's masculine archetype. Álvaro's assertion of his own subjective desires is manifest even as a young boy, when his aversion to compulsory physical exercise causes family friend and his teacher, padre Aizpuru, to chastise and taunt him. Upon his mother's learning of his non-participation in physical education class, she questions his sexuality: "¿a ti, te gustan las niñas, verdad, Álvaro? [you like girls, don't you Álvaro?](181). Importantly, Álvaro objects to entering any profession that is related to the source of his father's wealth, the construction industry, as despite his father's pleas, he steadfastly refuses to train to become an architect.

His performance of masculinity does not cohere to Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, for he is not dependent upon female subordination to obtain a sense of manliness. During his affair with Raquel he becomes the subordinate one, forever attempting in vain to grasp her personality, and the victim of her striving to score "el pelotazo de mi vida" [the score of my life] (868). Far from pleasing men, Raquel uses and dispenses with them, deciding that while her first husband was suitable to enjoy cocaine-fueled orgies, he wasn't reliable father material (646). It is significant that the adult Raquel is not represented in terms of relationality, but is in fact, nearly always alone (except for her trysts with Álvaro), and she is the object of Álvaro's pursuit not vice-versa. In fact, the coldly calculating Raquel is far more representative of hegemonic masculinity than Álvaro, who is blatantly unconcerned with the trappings of social success. Her profession, an economist, associates her with the masculine world of finance, and her quest for vengeance against the Carrión Otero family can be interpreted as a desire to redress her grandfather's victimization by humiliating a hegemonic masculinity. This female reversal of the unjust postwar

hierarchization of men, in effect, the woman as avenger, destabilizes normative configurations of gender by invoking female aggression and rancor, characteristics typically associated with men.

Raquel's assumption of hegemonic masculinity is corresponded by the feminization of Álvaro, who becomes the object of female sexual pleasure, manipulation, and rejection, with Raquel's deceitfulness and later disappearance causing him immense pain. His masculinity is representative of what bell hook terms "feminist masculinity", which comprises the traits of "integrity, self-love, emotional awareness, assertiveness and relational skill, including the capacity to be empathic, autonomous and connected" (118). For hooks, patriarchal culture's injunctions of emotional remoteness and competitiveness among men makes "the man who dares to love" rare, and thus, she proposes the replacement of this belligerent and frequently misogynist patriarchal model with "a benevolent patriarchy", which promotes masculine tenderness and kindness (125). The very antithesis of the virile macho man, this "new man" is characterized by an "unassertive manner, a desire for nurturing activities and a wish to express emotion" (Cornwall and Lindsfarne 58). Álvaro's masculinity is actually constituted by qualities traditionally considered feminine, such as nurturing and caring, and for him, fathering is an active responsibility for which he assumes equal responsibility to his wife, Mai. In this novel, this new man ideology dismantles the gendered division of labor that had traditionally complemented male supremacy in Francoist Spain; Álvaro's sexually open marriage to Mai is based on equality, and each partner performs their equal share of household tasks (169). More importantly, his love for his son is articulated in unabashedly sentimental and sensuous prose that references the male baby's smells and skin quality, and is so overwhelming that it surpasses his love for his wife (262). His willingness to change the baby's diapers implies a gender equalization within the family, and is symptomatic of a participatory style of fatherhood, grounded in a new man ideology,

that celebrates and validates men's feminine side. The capacity to experience the type of emotional pain suffered by Álvaro in the wake of Raquel's disappearance is further indicative of his "new man" identity, defined as a man conscious and accepting of a wide range of emotions.

Relatedly, an implicated style of fatherhood is central to Álvaro's older brother, Julio's self-conception: "Yo puedo ser un mal marido, Álvaro, pero soy un buen padre. A mí me encantan mis hijos" [I may be a bad husband, Álvaro, but I am a good father. I love my children] (206). Discarding all pretense, he leaves his wife, Asun, and children to be with his mistress, Verónica, even when this implies considerable financial hardship. Nurturing, enjoyment, and tenderness all permeate his description of his children's custodial visits, which culminate in the entire family watching the Disney Channel together (265). More impressively, he is penitent for having left his wife, and assumes full responsibility for her upkeep, bearing the financial brunt of the divorce himself. The dialogue between the siblings elides masculinist discourse of power or disparagement of lesser masculinities and women, representing complex relational male characters that self-define in terms of the quality of their familial relationships. The underlying implication of this dialogue is that contemporary Spanish masculinity is a self-generated construct, intimately connected with men's needs for emotional expressivity and familial warmth.

At polar odds to his father's ostensible compliance with National-Catholicism, Álvaro and Julio exemplify an individuated male subjectivity divorced from the capitalist accumulation and mandatory displays of masculine virility that conditioned their father's masculinity. Men, especially upper middle class ones are no longer afraid of being "more sensitive, caring, present and gender-equal" (Johannson and Ottemo 200). The brothers' performance of fatherhood contradicts normative masculinist ideals centered on a distant and disciplinarian model of fatherhood by relocating it in the emotional realm. Their fathering is

consistent with the contemporary fashioning of fathers as “co-parents who are responsible for gender, cognitive, intellectual and academic development” and fatherhood itself as a bond premised on a loving nexus (Aitken 225). These “new fathers” belong to the generational demographic of Generation X, born between 1965 to 1980, who have adopted an emotionally engaged model of fatherhood.<sup>3</sup> The sternness and authoritarianism represented by the Francoist patriarch is subverted by this caring and tolerant father, who prioritizes the child’s well-being; eschewing the authoritarian paternal archetype, their visions of fatherhood are based on respect for one’s fellow men, integrity, and emotional closeness.

The tension between the brothers’ parenting styles and Julio Senior’s model of fatherhood is demonstrated in their divergent opinions about male involvement in childrearing: when Álvaro soothes Miguelito, his father looks on in dismay, incredulous at any signs of male childrearing (205). When Julio Junior asks his father for money to cover his maintenance payments, his father refuses the money on the grounds that Julio has not kept up appearances, which entails simultaneously maintaining his marriage and mistress. Instead of paying maintenance and preserving his familial links with his children, he proposes that he simply replace them with a new family: “Muy bien, pues ten más niños, ahora tienes una mujer muy joven” [Very well, have more children, now you have a very young wife] (210). His hardhearted reply contradicts the rose-hued vision of Francoist familial solidarity by crudely reducing it to the reproductive function, and disavowing emotional connectivity as its fulcrum. Positing women as expendable fecund bodies, it exhibits the hallmarks of the most rancid variant of Francoist hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, Julio Junior’s resultant endurance of straitened circumstances privileges his non-materialistic, family-oriented conceptualization of masculinity, encapsulated by his dismissive attitude to money: “¿Qué es el dinero? No fabrica nada, no sirve para nada, sólo para gastarlo, para conseguir placeres”

[What is money? It doesn't make anything, it's only useful for spending and obtaining pleasures] (210).

The abyss between father and son originates in the obsolescence of an authoritarian model of patriarchal fatherhood, and the accretive effects of transformations in gender ideology in the democratic period. Masculinity is constructed not solely through power relations, but by “their interplay with a division of labour and with patterns of emotional attachment” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 112). The sophistication of postmillennial Spain, in which basic citizen's rights have been secured, permit the citizenry to develop sexual, economic, and social identities, which would have been inconceivable for their parents (Kennedy 192). A neoliberal economic climate produces a distinct and autonomous gender identity, untethered to “the ties that previously bound both representations of the body and self to the symbolic collective or/of nation and non-identitarian notions of sexuality” (Venkatesh 4). The incorporation of two million women into the labor market in the post-1975 period has transformed masculinity as much as femininity, destabilizing the traditional form of masculinity incarnated by Julio. The legalization of homosexuality in 1979, and the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2005 propitiated a new climate of tolerance and inclusivity; in 2013, a survey revealed that 88% of Spaniards are accepting of homosexuality (Khazan). Furthermore, Spanish citizens' inordinately enthusiastic endorsement of a dual identity, of being Spanish and European (Closa and Haywood 68), means that they no longer view national gender stereotypes as binding.

Dematrikis Z. Demetriou, however, stresses that hegemonic masculinity's responsiveness to the reconfiguration of gender does not necessarily culminate in the amelioration of previously subjugated groups' circumstances, or in increased equality. In concurrence with Demetriou's contention, Singleton and Maher qualify the “new man/new father” ideology by stressing its superficiality. As they note, “secondary involvement remains

the norm, and Generation X men only take responsibility during designated small blocks of time” (237). Their contentions are affirmed by Álvaro’s callous disregard for his family which is licensed by a male subjectivity, partially wrought by neoliberal dictates on the necessity of consumerism and the prioritization of individual preferences. This masculinity is typically post-moral in its conceptualization of a flexible family form, judging it on its amenability to individual self-realization. Giles Lipovestky describes it as follows:

La familia posmoralista es, pues, una familia que se construye y reconstruye libremente como se quiere. Ya no se respeta la familia en sí, sino la familia como instrumento de realización de las personas, la institución obligatoria se ha metamorfoseado en institución emocional y flexible. (69)

[The postmoral family is a family that freely constructs and reconstructs itself however it wants. The family itself is no longer respected, only the family as an instrument for personal fulfillment. The obligatory institution has metamorphosised into a flexible and emotional institution].

The postmoral family is a derivative of the “detached hyper-individualism” that reigns in the era of hyper-capitalism and in the aftermath of the dissolution of the moral and social imperatives that once regulated social life (33). In his analysis of Lipovestky’s scholarly writings, Flaquer contends that this familial model has culminated in an individualist partnership, in which each partner prioritizes their own happiness, even before financial considerations (72). From the outset, Álvaro defines his marriage in terms of its temporariness, commenting that the first nine years of his marriage to Mai have been happy, and that neither one “había dado todavía señales de desánimo” [had shown signs of disillusionment] (65). His description of their marital dynamics clarifies that there is a cogent demarcation of personal independence: “Ella guarda mi independencia y yo, la mía” [She keeps her independence, and I keep mine] (167). Although he appreciates Mai’s

unobtrusiveness, he is plagued by doubts about the constraints and opportunity costs inherent in marriage, and he ruminates on what he is losing out on in order to appear as the ideal couple (66). His evaluation of his marriage is disturbingly individualistic, and refigures marriage as a revocable contract. Clearly, he envisions a liberated existence, one of satisfaction and fulfillment, a life built upon intentionality and individualism rather than obligation and role filling, and evinces no compunction in leaving his family for the more attractive Raquel. Hyper-individualism ultimately proves pernicious to the individual because it culminates in excessive behavior and pathologies (Lipovetsky 33), and certainly, Álvaro's copious commentary on sexual euphoria attests to that symptomatology (Sánchez 62).

### **A Gendered Memory**

The death of his father compels Álvaro to uncover the memory of Spain's turbulent past via an investigation into the life and death of his grandmother, whose memory had been transmitted to him by an artificial rose-hued version of the past (564). Her memory is only accessible through typical family photos of her wedding to Benigno (771), which reduce the complexity of her life to a preordained domestic existence, and efface her defiance of local gender conservatism in the 1930s. Teresa González Puerto is the very antithesis of Angélica's complementary femininity, emblemizing as she does a defiant politically active female archetype during the Second Republic, 1931-1936. Her name is significant, insofar, on first analysis it ostensibly encodes an ironic subversion of another Francoist womanly archetype, the 15<sup>th</sup> Century religious icon, Santa Teresa de Ávila. Francoist bowdlerizing resulted in the omission of Santa Teresa's inquiring mind, her participation in religious reform, and her Jewish origins, and she was instead recast as a paragon of female docility (Graham 185). Teresa's breaching of reactionary gender norms and her proactive stance to political reform parallels her to a historically rigorous version of the pioneering Santa Teresa.

Daughter of a poverty-stricken schoolteacher, she is obliged by circumstances to marry Benigno Carrión, an unprepossessing man who becomes besotted by her. In the first few years of her marriage, she resides in a state of tedious contentment, but the advent of the Spanish Second Republic in 1931 enables her self-realization and stirs marital discord. The Constitution of 1931 afforded women the right to maternity insurance and legalized civil marriage, but it also aspired to redress discrimination in the workplace by ratifying pro-feminist labor laws (Ryan, 2006). Furthermore, women's increasing control over their own reproduction caused a fall in the birthrate from 27.55% in 1931 to 24.85% in 1936. This legitimized a new conceptualization of marriage as a complicitous union whose sustainability was based on the continuing satisfaction of both the wife and husband. In the first year ensuing its ratification, 7,059 demands were made, and 4,105 of them culminated in the granting of divorce (González Calleja et al 1978).

The advances made in divorce, abortion, and women's incorporation into the working world as well as educational reforms "permitieron una transición hacia un modelo familiar teóricamente más libre" [permitted a transition toward a theoretically freer familial model] (Iglesias de Ussel and Klosa 725). Grandes's excerption of María Teresa León's *Memoria de la Melancolía* in the prelude to the first part of the novel, *El corazón*, pays implicit tribute to the 1932 divorce law, referencing as it does León's divorce from Gonzalo de Sebastián Alfaro, one of the most famous of that era (Torres 118). In this novel, these dramatic changes facilitate his grandmother's political participation in left-wing groups, while also reversing the balance of power in Benigno and Teresa's marriage. Teresa's new found confidence imbues her with the courage to transcend gender limitations, to address ineffable themes, such as their nonexistent sex life (Grandes 228), to announce her intention to divorce her husband, and to withstand ostracism by the village women. Flouting convention, she ceases to invest time in grooming, instead becoming a well-known local figure who earns the

respect of her co-ideologues (230). She also declares her intention to reprise her teacher-training, and admits to herself that she feels more comfortable speaking at political meetings than in the home. Later, Álvaro's grandmother's initiation of a relationship with their lodger, the *guardia civil*, Manuel Castro, annihilates Benigno's masculinity, converting him into "una sombra" [a shadow] (229).

Teresa's affair, her political activism, and her deprioritization of the home approximate to a performance of female masculinity, the female assumption of the male role and its attendant sexual and social privileges. In her groundbreaking work, *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam contends that biological maleness is not a prerequisite for a male gender performance. She adduces a relatively prosaic example, the recent spate of James Bonds films, to illustrate her contention. In her estimation, masculinity, understood as the efficient exercise of power, is most convincingly evoked by M, Bond's female superior, in MI6, played by Judy Dench in these films (52). Under her trajectory of thought, masculinity is disentangled from its biological basis, and is reduced to a performance of power, control, and autonomy that may very well be enacted by a woman. Halberstam warns that this performance is socially condemned, invariably interpreted "as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always out of reach" (9). Furthermore, biological maleness does influence the distribution of cultural and political power, and consequently, men obtain disproportionately higher levels of both than women (16).

Teresa's instantiation of female masculinity subverts the traditional configuration of motherhood and fatherhood, and she becomes the primary quasi-paternal figure of respect for her son. His admiration for his father rises in inverse proportion to his disregard for his father, who has always shown "una indiferencia por sus hijos" [indifference towards his children] (225), and is obliged to coerce affection from the child by giving him pocket-

money. The sexualization of his mother, implicit in her relationship with Manuel Castro, riles Julio into assuming the mantle of the patriarchal role of the man of the house: (245). Teresa's death in Ocaña prison in 1941 symbolizes the Franco Regime's obliteration of all vestiges of Republican female political participation, which formed the cornerstone of the postwar retrenchment of an ossified gender segregation (Graham 185). However, *Grandes* demonstrates Francoist masculinity to be not only deceitful and shoddy in the case of Julio, but her depiction of Benigno's descent into alcoholism casts him as a figure of pathetic ineffectuality, whose degeneracy reiterates that Francoist masculinity is lacking in integrity and self-respect.

Álvaro's uncovering of Teresa's life-story causes him to be resentful of his father's concealment of an important part of his heritage, the existence of a cultivated and courageous grandmother, who died for her political convictions. While the memory of his grandmother undoubtedly acts as an unimpeachable moral referent (524), it simultaneously vindicates Álvaro's masculinity by providing him with a historical example of autonomous, connected masculinity, performed by a woman. His description of his admiration for Teresa highlights her simultaneously protectory and empathetic qualities: "tuve la sensación de que mi abuela Teresa, su presencia dulce y benéfica, seguía volando sobre mi cabeza, amparándome y protegiéndome a la vez" [I had the sensation that the gentle and beneficial presence of my grandmother, Teresa, continued to fly over my head, simultaneously sheltering and protecting me] (544). Her self-fashioning and decisiveness in her personal life chimes with his feminist masculinity and the neoliberal emphasis on autonomy. Her personhood is refigured as adaptive and resourceful in macro-historical contexts, where agency was historically denied to women, and if exercised, was excised from Spanish history manuals. As historian María Gallego Méndez sarcastically comments in relation to the omission of women from Spanish history: "las mujeres no hacían nada" [women didn't do anything] (63).

*El corazón helado*'s reinscription of a contemporary and historical leveling of biological and cultural gender differences subverts the gendered status quo. Grandes's denormalization of traditional Francoist masculinity, her tempered portrayal of the "new man" role, and the invocation of a defiant female masculinity refigure gender performativity as malleable and individualistic. Álvaro and Julio epitomize shifts in the gender order that have led to formation of a new and family-oriented masculinity, which is paradoxically infused with a postmoral and flexible conceptualization of the family. The sternness and authoritarianism represented by the Francoist patriarch is subverted by this cultural exaltation of the caring, tolerant father, who prioritizes the child's well-being and enters into a loving relationship premised on mutual respect. The memory of Álvaro's grandmother provides a much-needed and morally unquestionable foundation for Álvaro's feminist masculine identity, ensuing his disillusionment with his father. Grandes's depiction of their trans-generational complicity privileges the tenets of postmillennial feminist masculinity, while concurrently deauthorizing Francoist hegemonic masculinity, and dignifying a defiant Republican feminine identity long consigned to oblivion.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>The enormous success of the revisionist historian, Pío Moa's 2005 pseudohistorical apologia on Nationalist culpability, *Los mitos de la Guerra civil* and the vehemence of 20<sup>th</sup> November demonstrations in *Valle de los Caídos*, manifests the persistence of a pro-Francoist side, which begs the question: how do their families rationalize their forefathers' suspected implication in atrocities, skullduggery, indifference, or incidental profiting from the Francoist victory? The latter possibility has a particularly personal resonance for Grandes, who hails from an ideologically polarized 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].

<sup>2</sup> In her study of military cadets, Susan Faludi uncovered a hidden and caring subculture within a military training academy in South Carolina, whereby the men nurtured each other in order to withstand the rigor of

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military training [365). Similarly Michael Moller's survey of men found that the pleasures experienced in the family and with friends were highly valued by men, who affirmed their desire "for even greater social intimacy" [274). Moreover, the family provides a reprieve for men, and for the articulation of thoughts and the display of emotions considering unmasculine in the wider society [Kaufman 18), a finding that disproves the current theoretical tendency to treat "men as a social group existing outside gender [familial) relations" [Mac an Ghaill et al 62).

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, they personify the Spanish new father, represented in films such as *El Bola* by Alfredo's father, José, who is caring and respectful toward his son, Alfredo, and thoughtfully explains his viewpoint to him, rather than enforcing it. Similarly, in *Los lunes al sol*, Paula's father, Rico, the bar-owner, is an easygoing dad, who does not police Paula's nocturnal outings. A generational coeval, former Spanish president, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (b.1960) can be considered an exemplar of this new relaxed model of fatherhood. For Zapatero, it is crucial that his two daughters respect his integrity and honesty, "que nunca tengan que vivir con un referente negativo de su padre, de su honestidad" [that they never have to live with a negative reference about their father, about his honesty] (qtd in de Toro 28).

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