

# Memory, Language and Trauma in the Work of Félix Grande

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A dissertation submitted to Queen Mary, University of London, in  
accordance  
with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Hispanic Studies  
18 February 2010

Word Count: 80,052

## DECLARATION

I, María Pilar Cáceres Casillas, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,052 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

My thesis explores how memory and trauma permeate the work of the poet Félix Grande (Mérida, Spain, 1937). It addresses the question of how his particular understanding of memory is opposed to a rather bleak view of it held by many other Spanish poets of the time. Grande does not yield to a generalized discrediting of memory. On the contrary, memory is the driving force behind his writing, and this thesis constitutes an analysis of its mechanisms. The originality of Grande's work stems from the ways in which it shares common ground with contemporary research carried out by disciplines that integrate Memory and Trauma Studies. His poetic voice struggles to grasp aspects of memory whose articulation proves traumatic. These elements resist symbolic translation and turn his poetry into a work of constant rumination without closure. Grande's work illustrates that literature is both inextricably linked to memory, and is well equipped to deal with trauma, as the labour carried out by memory, weaving and un-weaving, especially in its attempts to mourn, is at the heart of his artistic production. Finally, his work instantiates a relationship with language and memory which, while recognising the limits of language to express and of memory to retrieve the past, goes beyond this initial distrust to offer a positive perspective on these faculties, as the means for establishing modes of survival and rethinking our connections to the unknown.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Identifying (justifying) memory and trauma as problematics in Grande's work

*Una nueva forma de narrar no implica necesariamente innovaciones espectaculares de carácter técnico o verbal sino un simple desplazamiento de la óptica. El asunto consiste en encontrar el ángulo novedoso que nos permita una aprehensión inédita de la realidad.*

(Julio Ramón Ribeyro, *La tentación del fracaso*)

Memory appears to be a recurrent element in the poetry of the Spanish poetical generations of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet very few books deal with the subject in relation to the poetry written in post-Civil War Spain.<sup>1</sup> Félix Grande (Mérida, Badajoz, 1937), a poet whose poetic work spans the period between 1958 and 1984, produced significant ideas in the field of memory which, to a great degree, represented a shift in the ways it was generally viewed and by other poets of the time.<sup>2</sup> However, no one has yet examined at length the treatment of memory in his work.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of memory in the work of Francisco Brines, for instance, see Gómez Toré (2002).

<sup>2</sup> See Pérez Parejo (2002), García Martín (1986) and Lanz (2000) on the importance of memory in these generations. I use the controversial notion of “generation”, following Debicki, as an operative concept to refer to the Spanish poets born between 1929 and 1938: “it seems preferable to me [...] to accept the concept of a generation as a pragmatic way of grouping and examining a set of writers who clearly have much in common, whose backgrounds and work differ in

The main trait distinguishing Grande's work from that of many other poets of his literary generation is that the former seems to take a step further in exploring the meaning and workings of memory. Grande's texts are not simply concerned with the passage of time. His poems also raise other interesting questions, such as the relationship between memory and specific visions of time, the fashioning of identity through memory, or the interweaving of memory and ethics.

Grande's poetry has also been affected by the same neglectful attitude that, according to Middleton and Woods, has led critics to focus on contemporary poetry's confessional style, leaving unnoticed "the significance of the treatment of time and memory in poetry" (2000: 188). The existing body of criticism on Grande's work does not enter into any attempted detailed interpretations or explanations of how time, and more significantly, the effects of catastrophe manifest themselves in his work. Critics have limited their criticism to highlighting the autobiographical dimension of his poetry, without taking into account the fact that the concept of autobiography itself is complex and problematic.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, there is still much debate as to whether or not autobiography should be viewed as mere fiction, or if it should instead be seen to lay claim to a certain veracity.<sup>4</sup>

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significant ways from those of their contemporaries who are older or younger, and who can be best understood when studied in relation to one another" (1982: 15).

<sup>3</sup> See my bibliography on Grande's work.

<sup>4</sup> An illustrative case is that of Philippe Lejeune. Lejeune's views have varied from his conviction about the "fictional" status of the genre of autobiography in 1975, toward a radical reconsideration of the latter, to the extent of expressing remorse: ¿Cómo he podido escribir semejantes cosas? [he refers to his old assumptions] Sin duda exagero porque quiero mostrar la importancia del pacto: sólo él establece la diferencia. Pero se me va la mano. [...] Y sobre todo me confundo, asimilo relato y ficción, craso error. Hoy sé que narrar la vida es simplemente vivir. Nosotros somos hombres-relato. La ficción es inventar algo diferente a esta vida. He leído a Paul Ricoeur (incluso si a veces no le he entendido del todo), sé que la identidad narrativa no es una quimera" (2004: 163).

I will try to demonstrate that Grande's poetry—I shall mainly focus on poems written in the period 1952-1984, although I will also be referring to his works in prose—is intimately linked to memory, not only because it abounds in memories.<sup>5</sup> Many of his poems also reflect on memory's psychic mechanisms, on how these work and why they are essential for survival. Furthermore, there is a third fundamental link between memory and Grande's work: certain configurations of memory in his poetry emanate from the need to create sites (of containment) of personal and collective catastrophe. Both the necessity to survive and a moral imperative are conflated in his work and direct his writing.

Memory appears to be at the origin of Grande's artistic production, constituting, also, a point of arrival, connecting past with future, character with will, destiny with freedom. His texts often begin with an exercise of memory, as if memory were a sort of breakfast in the early morning whose energy one needs in order to go through the day: "Desayunémonos con una hostia de recuerdo", he writes in "Diana" from *Taranto* (45-46).<sup>6</sup> Yet memory is only energetic in appearance, for it often moves relentlessly in circles, back and forth to the same enigmatic loss that grounds Grande's poetry. Furthermore, it seems to constitute a source of ethical indignation that both reinforces and paralyzes the self. Grande's approach to memory entails a specific "theory" of the self and its main components—language and freedom. And "freedom" in this case means, as shall be seen, engaging the imagination with ethical choices.

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<sup>5</sup> Grande has another work in verse in progress.

<sup>6</sup> When page numbers of Grande's poetry are given without a year, they will all belong to his (1989) work, where all his poetry is collected.



This thesis shows that Grande's poetry embarks on a quest through language, which leads to both voluntary and unconscious formations of memory and to linguistic elaborations of biographical and historical traumatic events. Despite the distrust with which many of Grande's contemporaries regarded memory, similar to their lack of confidence in language, some aspects of the treatment of memory in Grande's work can be understood as illustrative of a more positive view which has significantly gained credence in contemporary studies on the phenomenon. Such a view is twofold. On the one hand, it points out that memory is crucially and centrally creative and adaptive. On the other, it argues that these traits, far from denoting unreliability or unfaithfulness, can be understood, more positively, as the means for constructing ways of better understanding the self and its relation to the world (Ruiz-Vargas 1997 and 2002). For if memory relates to events—often painful and disturbing—that cannot be changed, it can nevertheless deal with them in ways that reshape and modify our history and identity. As illustrated by poetry intimately linked to the Holocaust—of which Paul Celan is a remarkable example—memory works through extremely distressing experiences and it attempts to survive them (Middleton and Woods 2000: 11).

In their underlining the autobiographical character of his work, one crucial aspect to which Grande's critics have not paid enough attention is precisely the traumatic dimension readable in his poetry: "Soy un sobreviviente", Grande (2001) repeats several times in *Taranto*, a work whose origin is his emotional affiliation with the Peruvian César Vallejo, a poet with a sensitivity similar to Grande's: "Hasta donde mi memoria recuerde, siempre fui un sobreviviente. Tal vez nací siendo un sobreviviente. Y marcado, como las

reses en el lomo, para ser un sobreviviente (Grande 2001: 141).<sup>7</sup> Grande explains what he means by defining himself as a “survivor”:<sup>8</sup>

Quiero decir que vivo con la guerra civil marcada en el ojo del huracán de mis emociones, como las reses en el lomo. Es algo así como si una leyenda dijera, en letras irregulares de graffiti: <<Propiedad de la guerra civil>>. (2001: 143-44)

In “Generación” from *Taranto* (49-51) we read a more detailed explanation of what being born a survivor means. The poem is an account of war, poverty and derangement caused by tragic historical events. The nourishment of a mother breastfeeding a child amidst a terrible war is lyrically transmuted into a destructive weapon for the child:

Y después me ponía sus trágicos pezones en la boca,  
ebrios de obuses, apresurados de sobrevivencia casual,  
para que yo chupara mi destino  
y cojeara luego con la niñez sin tronos. (50)

Grande’s work may have as a point of departure a wound, a psychic and historic wound rooted in the recalling of his own infancy, whose backdrop is that of the catastrophe brought upon Spain by the Civil War. If his infancy is a constant theme in his poetry, it is apparent that its evocation is painfully traumatic. What I am interested in exploring is whether such an injury, far from being a mere theme in his poetry, can

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<sup>7</sup> These words are reminiscent of Miguel Hernández’s following lines: “Como el toro he nacido para el luto/ y el dolor, como el toro estoy marcado/ por un hierro infernal en el costado” (1979: 21).

<sup>8</sup> “Survivor” is also the term used in trauma theory, replacing the term “victim” which has more negative connotations than survivor.

actually be seen as constituting the psychic and emotional “truth content” from which his poetic configurations of memory develop.<sup>9</sup> However, this “content” does not have an exact referent: we will never know for certain what it was that terrified him so early in life and has accompanied him since:<sup>10</sup>

Crujió mi infancia y me encontré perdido, abandonado [...] Descubrí [...] que hay una relación maravillosa entre lo más profundo del corazón humano y el reino insólito de las palabras. (2001: 116)

We can only attest to the existence of a wound that sets a particular kind of memory in motion. In this respect, Grande’s poem “Recuerdo de infancia” (182) from the collection *Blanco spirituals* (1966), in which the poetic voice remembers having seen animals being slaughtered and compares their slaughtering with the genocide suffered by whole communities, tells the story of a private memory and, more importantly, constitutes a specific way of remembering. Memories of catastrophe and massacre associated, among other things, with the Civil War leave an imprint of such magnitude on the poet that they will forever haunt his writing. Grande’s texts show that the “niñez” (infancy or childhood) is the period where something fundamental is lost. And the latter hypothesis can be regarded as a driving force behind Grande’s art:

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<sup>9</sup> Hannah Arendt explains that Walter Benjamin distinguishes between subject matter and the “truth content of a work of art”, the latter being a concealed dimension of the work of art, for which clarification a critique is required, rather than a commentary (1999:10). I believe that this is true of Grande’s work, in which different subject matters can be identified but which nevertheless redirect us to a “truth content” that necessitates a “global” critique.

<sup>10</sup> The Civil War cannot be said to be the “truth content” of Grande’s work, but a wound whose origin and meaning is rooted in this historical event (in ways that remain unknown to the poet), and which supersedes any historical (and biographical) context to configure a content of its own.

Pero llega un momento en que uno comprende como oficiante de las palabras, como escritor, como sirviente de las palabras, que sin la memoria no hubiera sido posible ser un escritor, que sin la recuperación a través de la memoria de acontecimientos originarios y de llagas originarias, de deslumbramientos originarios, no se podría haber acumulado esa cuenta corriente emocional sobre la que después te asientas para trabajar con las emociones, es decir, para trabajar con las palabras.<sup>11</sup>

It often occurs with tragic poets—of which Grande is an example—that their writing begins with a loss in the period of infancy, one that might well be the loss of infancy itself.<sup>12</sup> “Cómo hacer elegías a la niñez”, how to write an elegy to childhood, the poet posits this question in “Oda fría a una cajetilla de L & M” (183-185) from *Blanco spirituals*. Throughout all Grande’s collections, the bleeding of the poet’s own childhood does not merely represent a biographical detail; it is rather a reconstruction of catastrophe itself that encompasses reflections on the human condition: “el mundo continúa menstruando aún desde la prehistoria” (184).<sup>13</sup> This latter trait should discourage interpretations of Grande’s poetry that see it as “merely” confessional.<sup>14</sup>

As we will see further on, the articulation of trauma, an extremely difficult enterprise (if not an impossible one), points to a certain structure of writing, rather than a mere “theme” or “subject-matter”. My thesis will explore the ways in which the poetic

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<sup>11</sup> In conversation with Grande (1-2-2007).

<sup>12</sup> Idea Vilariño, for instance, remembers, in an interview with Mario Benedetti, the moment she probably became a poet: “A los once años me quedé mirando en un espejo mis ojos serios, adultos. Fue una conmoción profunda saber que yo estaba ahí –persona, no niña– como estoy hoy” (1981: 211).

<sup>13</sup> The metaphorical use of the term “menstruando” feminizes somehow human suffering, making it both cyclic and doomed.

<sup>14</sup> In my opinion, the (self) analytic dimension of his poetry has been underestimated.

voice re-enacts and struggles to understand this cognitive and emotional foundering. Yet memory in Grande's work is not reducible to traumatic recalling, for his *oeuvre* is also a celebration of tradition and transmissibility. Yet his morality is that of the "weak".<sup>15</sup> His poetic voice's point of view can be said to be "Benjaminian" in that it seeks identification with the perspective of the drowned, the humiliated, that is, it speaks with the voice of the vanquished, through the lenses of failure:

Todo mi oficio se reduce a buscar sin piedad ni descanso la fórmula con que poder vociferar socorro y que parezca que es el siglo quien está aullando esa maravillosa palabra. Que salga esta derrota de lo más puro de mi corazón y llegue a los demás impregnada de siglo veinte y de universo, como un insulto espléndido cuyo esqueleto es de amor y de desgracia. Que adviertan que me puse entre los torcidos del mundo para ayudarles a zurcir y defendí a la vida con todo mi terror. Clamar socorro como el nombre de un dios.<sup>16</sup> (270-271)

The poetic voice aligns itself with those who constitute, to use Norberto Bobbio's words, the non-history, the forgotten ones, its ethical attitude being very close to that described by Bobbio with the term "mite"—the powerless, the insignificant, the invisible, the impotent, he who leaves no trace in the archives of collective memory:

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<sup>15</sup> The term "weak" is not pejorative in my discourse. I am drawing here on Nietzsche's ideas of strength and weakness, taking into account that "what Nietzsche calls 'strength' becomes, by his own criterion, a form of weakness and perhaps the other way around as well" (Olafson 1991: 557). I also draw on Norberto Bobbio (1994) who makes a morality of the insignificant; and on Reyes Mate (1991 and 2008), who relying among others on Walter Benjamin, places memory before logos and reminds us that memory is the logos of the vanquished. Memory from this standpoint is a method of thinking, another "logos" to attain knowledge and understanding.

<sup>16</sup> In the Introduction to Reyes Mate 2008, Catherine Chaliier explains how this choice of speaking on behalf of the ones who suffer is a profoundly ethical stance to take responsibility for the pain of others: "Se trata [...] de velar por la vulnerabilidad del prójimo, aunque se incapaz de pedir auxilio, y de descubrir cómo esa fragilidad del otro, fragilidad prometida a la muerte, liga a cada uno, con una fuerza que ella misma ignora, a una responsabilidad insustituible" (15).

La dolcezza e la mitezza [...] sono proprie dell'uomo privato, dell'insignificante, dell'inapariscente, di colui che nella gerarchia sociale sta in basso, non detiene potere su alcuno, talora neppure su se stesso, di colui di cui nessuno si accorge, e non lascia alcuna traccia negli archivi in cui debbono essere conservate solo le memorie dei personaggi e dei fatti memorabili [...] queste virtù [...] caratterizzano quell'altra parte della società dove stanno gli umiliati e gli offesi, i poveri, i sudditi che non saranno mai sovrani, coloro che muoiono senza lasciare altro segno del loro passaggio su questa terra che una croce con nome e data in un cimitero, coloro di cui gli storici non si occupano perché non fanno storia, sono una storia diversa, con la s minuscola, la storia sommersa o meglio ancora la non-storia. (1994: 21-22)

It sees history and tradition within the context of the remnants and ruins of successive civilizations:

La cultura entera en la que mamas perplejidad ha de ser abolida por los siglos biznietos de los siglos que aplastaron a otras culturas, de las que ni penumbras quedan; no ya que el planeta en el que todo esto pasea su repentino señorío se apagará lo mismo que un cigarrillo consumido, no quedando de su exterminio ni siquiera la música de la interrogación. (397)

Need, born out of fear and impotence, as well as trust and respect, are behind this obsession with keeping a record of disaster to preserve historical and emotional losses. Memory—as it occurs with language—is, on the one hand, the aggregating force capable of holding together the traces of ephemeral time. On the other hand, underlying the poetic's voice fixation with memory and the superlative importance accorded to language there seems to be the question of a crisis of identity, the absence of identity or a blurring of identity, that leads to the inability of separating (or distinguishing enough) the internal

and the external. I will show how this problem is related to the poetic voice's need for affiliations and how affiliations are often established between identity and negativity.<sup>17</sup> I will be exploring the strategies employed for self-recognition and self-fashioning in Grande's work. I will discuss the splitting of the poetic voice as a self-analytic tool and, also, as the means for fleeing.

The operation of constructing an "other" (where the external and the internal can ideally be integrated without pathological confusion), and that of self-analysis can only take place within the limits of language. I will address the question of how Grande's view of language is largely opposed to the critique of language carried out by many of the poets of his and later generations. Grande relies upon a tradition of poets—especially Luis Rosales, César Vallejo, Federico García Lorca and Antonio Machado—whose texts show a different kind of *relationality* with language. They avoid the excessive criticism undertaken by the critique of language. Their formulations differ from an altogether negative vision thereof.

Language, poetic remembrance and music, especially flamenco, constitute for Grande a means of healing a wounded self. His appreciation of flamenco, for instance, supports the idea that his poetry is worth studying from the perspective of traumatic memory, for the music of flamenco also presents inescapable connections with trauma.

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<sup>17</sup> Sánchez-Pardo (2004: 4) points to the fact that a tension always exists in the self between identity and non-identity, but she also observes that some sort of integration between the two is nevertheless necessary. Giving an account of oneself through the linguistic use of memory partakes of an experience in which a point of convergence between inside and outside is attained. Furthermore, she claims that "the problematization of the boundaries between inside and outside is a dilemma peculiar to all approaches to life and art that nonetheless gained a more acute impulse during modernism. Many modernist texts similarly stage a battle between mind and body, memory and desire, and the conflict between the need to remember and the longing to forget" (2004: 11).

Flamenco, indeed, is the music of relentless pain which Federico García Lorca referred to as “sonidos negros”. There can be no doubt about the relationship between the traumatic nature of Grande’s texts and their emotional attachment to flamenco. He declares:

La razón por la que entré en el palacio trágico del flamenco es otra [...] Cuando uno tiene una llaga de la infancia que no se cierra, el hilo musical no basta, necesitas música desconsolada. Eso me recuerda una frase maravillosa de Saramago: los hombres son animales inconsolables. La amistad, la poesía, el amor, la familia y, entre las artes, la música, son lo que más hondamente ayuda a curar la llaga. (2004c: 40)

Although memory is fundamentally manifested in and through language, it is also inextricably linked to music, especially traumatic memory, since trauma cannot be (fully) put into words. Grande’s poetic voice affirms: “Y nada/ puede recuperarse, excepto en forma/ de una gota de música” (91).<sup>18</sup>

An attentive reading of Grande’s poetry reveals that the poetic voice is constantly seeking to construct a coherent identity amongst poetic remembrances of disruptive and devastating experiences through affiliations with language, memory and music.<sup>19</sup> Seen this way, poetry seems to be more an enterprise for survival, rather than a mere

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Gray has also noted the links between trauma and some Andalusian/Arab music. Their scales and rhythms, he writes, are “the musical symptom of the aftermath of trauma, which is also its memory, the continuity of a mournful Andalusian/Arab voice across the Mediterranean” (2000: 636).

<sup>19</sup> Whilst the instability of identity in literature can be seen as a positive subversive mechanism, this occurrence must be understood here as something very different. Grande’s texts do not seem to pursue instability as a deliberate literary technique but rather they call attention to the links between poetry and traumatic living.



contemplative exercise or a deliberate attempt to create beauty.<sup>20</sup> Linking art and life makes it possible to conceive of poetry as “something” else, something that “takes art’s breath away”, poetry being the “interruption of art”—art understood as the uncanny. Poetry, rather than art understood as “artifice and the artificial”, would be an “event”, a “liberation”, “in the sense of free action” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1999: 44-45).

Poetry and life or poetry and history are inextricably connected in the literary production of post-Civil War poets, especially when memory is the motif of study. This view is supported by other critics. For instance, Christine Arkininstall (1993: 6) has criticized the fact that these poets’ works have principally been approached according to a linguistic-structuralist paradigm, without alluding to other equally relevant factors, such as the context of their works and the poet’s motivations. In a similar vein, Andrew P. Debicki has claimed that for analysing the poetry of the 1950s and the 1960s “the use of ‘New Critical’ techniques is of limited value” (1982: vii). Debicki also refers to the historical backdrop of these poets as fundamental in their literary formation:

These poets [...] born between 1929 and 1938, constitute precisely that generation which grew up during the war but reached adulthood after it. The traumas of the war and of the ten years following it were engraved upon them with the intensity of formative experiences, and formed a reservoir on which the poets drew in their later writings. (1982: 14)

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<sup>20</sup> Brotherston (1972) analyses *Blanco spirituals* as a strategy for overcoming the death drive. In establishing a link between art and life and talking about health and survival, I am indebted here to the work of Gilles Deleuze (1998).

It is important to situate Grande's poetic elaborations of memory firmly within the context in spite of which he was creating: that of the "official" engineers of memory—historians, ideologues and writers in favour of the Franco regime, whose works served to establish a dominant, biased and exclusive version of collective memory and national identity. For it would be unacceptable to ignore the fact that Grande, like many other poets and writers of his time, wrote the greater part of his work under the brutal conditions of the regime's repression and censorship, and under the constrictions of its ideological apparatus, which also sought to control the private aspects of individuals' lives. *Las rubáiyátas de Horacio Martín* (1970), for instance, can be taken as a cry of resistance against social repression. Such historical conditions condemned Grande to an inner exile, another issue worth investigating in connection with his poetic memory. His loss of the sense of belonging—at the core of any experience of exile, territorial or inner—and his painstaking quest for identity are visible throughout his poetry.

According to Paul Ilie, who has written one of the most exhaustive works on exile, "Félix Grande is a case whose exile has been demonstrated but who is disqualified from that category by the fact of residing and publishing at home" (1980: 91). Ilie has referred to the "estrangement that led Grande away from his social reality and into a mental construct of his past and future" (1980: 91). Such a "mental construct" of the poet's past and future might be understood as nothing but a labour of his memory and his imagination, a search for identity and the testimony of his struggle for survival through poetry. However, it is important to stress that testimony here is better conceived of not as communication of previous content, but as exploration of the void inherent in the psychic wound. In this sense, the poem can be said to be a testimony of its own making. Such an

exploration can be considered “performative” – also referred to as an “illocutionary act”; we mean by this “speech acts in which you do something by the very act of speaking” (Middleton and Woods 2000: 191). A poet’s witnessing to his own experiences constitutes also a testimony of his time. In this respect one of the things I will be discussing is how Grande’s personal testimony can be seen as a reflection on his historical time, precisely because, by attempting to take control over his own suffering, he ends up reflecting on that of the world in which he had to live. His poetry seeks for answers to the questions of death, suffering, and what it means to be human in catastrophic times

To summarize, I intend to explore Grande’s poetry as: a) a performative act of remembrance, that is, an act of recuperation and reflection in relation to catastrophic memories, which re-enacts the past in the very same act of its recalling, that is, as performative testimony (a way of bearing witness to and mourning suffering, injustice and loss); b) as the medium for expressing the unnameable (both structural and historical trauma); c) as a way of pursuing the integrity and continuity of the poet’s self through language in the midst of disrupting experiences and depression; d) and, finally, as an ethical dialogue between his personal catastrophe and what he sees as the catastrophe of the world around him. Seen from this perspective, memory is revealed as both a creative mechanism for constructing meanings and the result of that mechanism, which is, actually, an accurate view of what memory, experts claim, really is, as we shall see.

My reading of Grande’s poetry will also rely upon his literary context and the ideas of his contemporaries in order to stress his specific approach to the questions examined. This thesis will briefly touch upon the question of the relationship between

memory and the modern critique of language in order to show that the crisis of the word has contributed to forging pejorative ideas about memory. I will also argue that memory is crucial and central in literary creation and that one of its main functions is to construct and reshape perceptions of the self and the world surrounding it. From a theoretical perspective, I will draw on the works of the philosopher José Antonio Marina, the psychologist José María Ruiz-Vargas, Henri Bergson, Pierre Janet and Paul Ricoeur, as well as relying on insights from authors who have reflected on the connections between literature and memory. I argue that the question of memory does not belong to literature alone but, also” “to the culture of experts, of medicine and of science” (Middleton and Woods 2000: 82). Moreover, I defend the power of writing and reading poetry to become potentially a “homeopathic remedy”, to use Middleton and Woods’ words (2000: 191).

I would like to conclude this introduction by referring in passing to one question which is also crucially interwoven with my aims and choice of methodology. This question is reading, that is, interpreting. The much-vaunted post-modern self-sufficiency of the text has given rise to a superabundance of interpretations of a given text, however quaint and distant from each other. Against this, the literary critic and semiotician Umberto Eco declares that the act of reading must adhere to two principles: the principle of respect and the principle of economy. The principle of respect entails that the reader respects the *intentio operis*, that is, the author’s motivations, which are implicit in a text. We need to check the *intentio operis*, Eco claims, “against the text as a coherent whole” (1990: 59). David Robey explains what Eco means by this:

Interpretation is a dialectical or circular process whereby the empirical reader repeatedly tests and refines his conjectures (“abductions”) against the collection of signs that is the text and the intention implicit in it (*intentio operis*). (2000: 7)

The principle of economy, in its turn, implies that we take into consideration the cultural and linguistic background of the author. Robey has quoted Eco as stating: “If I want to interpret Wordsworth’s text I must respect his cultural and linguistic background” (2000: 7). As Robey explains, Eco considers that:

Every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader’s world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an economic way. (2000: 7)

The latter means that interpretation is indefinite but not infinite.<sup>21</sup> Thus the difference between interpreting a text and using it rests upon whether or not we apply the principles of respect and of economy. The so-called self-sufficiency of the text has led to views that overtly distort and deliberately misconstrue the *intentio operis* and that, by simply ignoring the context, do not take into consideration the competence postulated by the text by simply ignoring the con-text. Furthermore, Eco reminds us that the reader does not have to be accurate—in the sense of a naïve and absurd “scientific” objectivity—for

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<sup>21</sup> The Derridean notion of *différance* implies “an infinite number of sign-substitutions”. Language, for Derrida, is “a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain of and the play of signification infinitely” (2001a: 354). That is, if the reference is *differée à l’infini* that means absence of reference altogether and the possibility of infinite significations. Eco attacks Derrida’s form of deconstruction as does Levinas, the latter by pointing out the “absurdity” and “isolation” that lies in “countless significations” and he poses the following question: “do the significations not require a unique sense from which they borrow their significance?” (2003: 24).

reading entails a difficult transaction—every reading is, to certain degree, misreading, even if we adhere to the mentioned principles.<sup>22</sup> It means, rather, to be loyal, honest, respectful and compassionate. Genuine understanding involves this ethics of respect. For understanding implies to give respectful attention to whatever needs to be understood. And attention can adopt different modalities, as Marina recognizes: “Atiendo suspicazmente, desconfiadamente, esperando que el otro desbarre. Atiendo también pacientemente, con amor, con cuidado, con tenacidad” (1998: 292). That is the only way that one can be “objective”: becoming involved and being attentive in the second of

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<sup>22</sup> In this respect both French structuralism and Anglo-Saxon New Criticism have been equally naïve. The two sought to offer “objective” readings, the former by applying the scientific method to literature and the latter through its scientific-inspired seemingly objective prescription of a context-devoid reading. That New Criticism drew on some aspects of the Scientific Method was recognized from its outset: “The New Critics borrow their terms from the more general terms of science and thus, these critics can approximate the scientist’s tone of exactitude and accuracy”, Charles Moorman (1957: 182). The application of the Scientific Method in literature has led to overrating its formal aspect. As Bakhtin put it: “se trata de una tendencia de entender la forma artística como forma de una materia dada, nada más que como una combinación que tiene lugar en los límites de la materia, en su especificidad y regularidad impuestas por las ciencias naturales y la lingüística; eso daría a las consideraciones de los teóricos del arte la posibilidad de tener un carácter científicamente positivo, y, en algunos casos, se podría demostrar científicamente” (1995: 18). Yet the formal does not suffice to interpret literature. As George Steiner states, “the absolutely decisive failing occurs when such approaches seek to formalize meaning, when they proceed upward from the phonetic, the lexical and the grammatic to the semantic and aesthetic. It is this progression which no analytic-linguistic technique, [...] has even taken convincingly. [...] None of these proposals persuades. No interpretative method has bridged the gap between linguistic analysis and linguistic theory properly defined on the one hand and the process of understanding on the other. No formalization or genetic description has related unequivocally or demonstrably the discrete phonetic-lexical-syntactic components of a sentence to the meaning, to the lives (the semantic whole) of that sentence [...] A sentence always means more” (1989: 81 and 82). Robert Eaglestone (1997) calls attention to the absence of ethics in a mode of reading that exclusively considers the words on the page. For Levinas, Eaglestone explains, reading, conceived in that way, is an act of violence that separates thought from life. He proposes instead that the thinking taking place in every act of reading should engage with life and be committed to it. Similarly, Steiner argues that criticism must enter “into dialogue with the living”, that criticism “can connect” and that “literatures do not live in isolation, but in a manifold of linguistic and national encounters”; he proposes, then, a humane reading, that is, “to read as human beings” (1985: 8-11). For a further discussion, see also Steiner (1989: 80-86). Although these questions cannot be developed in greater detail in the framework of this thesis, it is important to schematically refer to them at least.

Marina's formulations, at the same time as developing detachment through "looking very hard", as the anthropologist Gregory Bateson shows in the following short dialogue:

Daughter: What does "objective" mean?

Father: Well. It means that you look very hard at those things which you choose to look at. (1972: 47)

Thus the manner in which this thesis proceeds can be described as using the "Hebrew" way of interpretation. In the words of psychoanalyst Neville Symington: "The Hebrew way is to go round and round a subject, each time using different images to illuminate what is most profound" (1986: 11). This is of utter importance in the case of Grande. When we are confronted with testimonial poetry we soon realize that there is something that resists us from which interpretation must begin if we are to be loyal to the text: this is the Benjaminian "truth content" suggested further above. For Eco this is true of any text, testimonial or not: "I believe that there is something that opposes our interpretative process, enables it to be born, and it is to this we must finally return" (2000: 195).

As to the organization of chapters, chapter I will be devoted to introducing memory in the context of what it meant historically under the Franco regime. I will show how silence and terror were imposed on a great part of Spanish society, which had a bearing on the ways Grande wrote and thought about memory.

Chapter II is aimed at establishing the theoretical basis on which this thesis hinges. It enquires into the question of memory from the perspectives of philosophy, cognitive psychology and literature. It offers an interdisciplinary overview of current knowledge on

the phenomenon. It shows that memory is a complex occurrence for the understanding of which it is necessary to combine forces from very different disciplines. The outline I present on the subject of memory is based on premises that can be said to be shared by a vast range of experts across many different fields. Then I continue to explore the relation of memory and trauma and their engagement with poetry. An exploration of memory and exile follows, in which I lay out the connections of memory with this experience of uprootedness.

In the following section I offer an overview of the Spanish crisis of the word and its implications for memory. The idea behind this research is to show how recurrent ideas on language, rooted in a long tradition but reformulated with modernism and postmodernism, were closely linked to general conceptualizations of memory at that time. Such an overview precedes a further discussion on the Spanish poetics of silence and upon the debate that preeminently dominated the Spanish poetry criticism of the second half of the twentieth century (the discourse over social/culturalist poetry). I argue that the discourse of the Spanish poetics of silence, by virtue of its domineering position, deflected attention and even excluded other similarly valid ways of understanding silence and its relation to poetics. Namely, that silence can be also defined by its origination in and confrontation with the inhuman and catastrophic events. I foreground the Holocaust and the poetry of Paul Celan to prove that a new perspective on the relationship between silence, poetry and history can be conceived of.

Since one of the implications of the Spanish crisis of the word and the poetics of silence, I argue, is its overlooking of the question of self-fashioning, the final section of chapter II is concerned with the exposition of how poetry opens up the space where the



self can recover and reshape its lost identity by claiming the void (silence) that necessarily inheres in it and by using language to give form to this void. In this section, I draw on different insights on the question of the limits of language and I highlight the role of language in self-construction.

The first part of chapter III offers an account of the importance of language in Grande's work. It argues that in order to understand the role of language in it, attention must be paid to his conceptualizations of death and love—lack of language (silence) is identified with separation and death; words, as love, are regarded as a unifying force.

I continue to present Grande's "theory" of memory and forgetting. This "theory" of memory consists in the "organic" view of a phenomenon that he also relates to practices, uses and abuses of the cognitive processes and emotions involved. It presents memory as a changeable and versatile "creature", a living organism, whose main function is adaption and on which the condition of the possibility for ethics stands.

Chapter IV is occupied with the question of trauma. It deals with the ways in which the workings of traumatic memory are readable in Grande's poetry. On the one hand, it recognizes trauma as a kind of bearing witness to an experience that cannot be fully named, that is, as unrecording witnessing. On the other hand, it attempts to "read", nevertheless, this "unreadability" through recurrent patterns which are present throughout his work. These are, namely, haunting figures of silence which not only speak *of* death but, more importantly, *from* death; unrepresentable losses evoked through death tokens; the creation of a poetic voice unrecognizable (not present) to itself; phantasmagorical places where the poetic voice sets out to construct sites of memory, used as containers for a bleeding poetic self; hyperbolic expressions of pain and incurable melancholia. The

sections integrating this chapter are necessary divisions but they are so closely linked that they continuously make cross references to each other.

## **1.2 Framing memory: its historical context under Francoism**

*It seems crucial to make a lot of noise about those who have disappeared without a trace,  
it seems important to mark that, to make the trace, to make a sound  
to disrupt that notion of the public sphere that would  
make certain kinds of images unseeable  
and certain kinds of noises inaudible  
certain kinds of words unsayable.*

(Judith Butler, talking about *the disappeared* in Chile)

*Quién restablecerá lo deshecho, levantará lo derribado, restaurará lo convertido en cenizas y en humo, la carne humana podrida sobre la tierra, qué se levantaría de ella si sonaran las trompetas de la resurrección; quién borraré las palabras que fueron dichas y escritas y alentaron el crimen y lo volvieron no sólo respetable y heroico, sino también necesario, fríamente legítimo.*

(Antonio Muñoz Molina, *La noche de los tiempos*)

“Lágrima miserable” addresses the ethical question of how pain can become the grounds on which whole communities are founded:

Vosotros, los que habláis del beneficio de los sufrimientos ¿imagináis la humanidad reuniéndose en las calles cotejando sus cicatrices; hundiendo las cabezas y apretados unos con otros como un rebaño de animales pequeños bajo una tormenta de nieve? ¿O imagináis la humanidad errabunda por los ejidos, rumiando su dolor como una mala hierba umbría? ¿Y esas imágenes os parecen solemnes?

Puedo ver como cada época descarga su impotencia en la siguiente y sospechar que esa es la causa de que aun no hayamos olvidado las antiguas cavernas. Puedo opinar que cuando dos se juntan para llorar rejuvenecen a la vejez de su miseria, cosechando con ello la calma de la claudicación. Puedo opinar que no se purifican, que se embriagan. No avanzan: se pasan uno a otro, monótonos, la antorcha que encendió la primera desgracia. No se ensanchan: se aíslan. Pues antes han corrido los visillos de la ventana. Algo hay cierto en el llanto: produce vergüenza a su autor.

Sueño algo mejor que esa vergüenza para después de las cenizas de todos estos siglos descompuestos. Sueño seres futuros cuyos recuerdos no sean, de ningún modo, como los míos. Sueño en que un día los antropólogos redacten un informe sobre nosotros, comenzando con estas espléndidas palabras: “Qué espanto, qué espanto”. (269)

In these imagined communities of the poem mourning never ends, as it would entail the loss of the very basis of the community’s existence. However, there must be some sort of revision and renovation of mourning for it to be genuinely so. Otherwise, a community becomes a culture in which the death drive prevails over the life drive. When carefully examined, Sánchez-Pardo’s explanation of the term “cultures of death drive” may be perfectly applied to post-Franco Spanish society. Here is her definition:

Material historical processes, trends, forces, and regulations that through involution and the deadening movement of repetition, inertia and stasis force themselves upon

individuals (or groups) and implement social and psychic exclusionary spaces encumbered and haunted by the physicality of their lost objects. These internal lost objects cannot be mourned and are instead clandestinely preserved inside the ego. (2004: 13)

These forces and trends of “involution”, “stasis”, and “inertia” determined post-Civil War dictatorial Spain, where “exclusionary spaces” were created (only some voices could be heard) and there were (and there are) spaces “haunted by the physicality of their lost objects”. These objects were not only “ideals” (as in the case of the failed Republican cause) but, also, assassinated people whose bodies were made to “disappear”. That Spanish society has not yet mourned all the losses attached to the Civil War and the dictatorship is scandalously evident. The exhumation of mass graves which has been recently taking place shows that Spanish society is still haunted by its lost objects, which are hitherto unmourned losses.<sup>23</sup>

What is most relevant in Sánchez-Pardo’s statement is that she establishes an unequivocal association between historical processes and the individual sphere. These historical processes, she claims, “forced themselves upon individuals” and preserved inside the ego. Butler makes the same statement but in reverse. She writes about loss “as constituting social, political, and aesthetic relations”, and not only belonging to “purely psychological or psychoanalytic discourses” (2003: 467). My thesis aims to explore these

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<sup>23</sup> Julián Casanova (2010) calls attention to the fact that a great part of Spanish society not only listlessly disavows but also reviles civil and judicial initiatives to recover losses in order to mourn them appropriately: “Están los que se ríen de quienes 'remueven tierra buscando huesos', proponen pasar página, negar el recuerdo, cancelar el pasado”. Needless to say, that part of Spanish history cannot be resolved without proper mourning. On the importance and meaning of mass graves exhumations in Spain today, see Francisco Ferrándiz Martín.

processes in the work of a single artist, for I believe that what is manifest at a social level can also be studied in conjunction with reflections of these historical forces onto the particular and the individual; in art as well, as one of the manifestations of individuality. Michael Richards asserts: “Spanish memories need all the more to be explored as both sociological and psychological (collectively and individually)” (2002: 4). In my overview of the subject, I refer to this double binding of the phenomenon of memory, in which the psychological and social cannot be disentangled. The two concepts—individual and collective memory—have been at the center of scientific scrutiny and cultural conflict. For Ruiz-Vargas:

La memoria autobiográfica tiene un origen psicosocial porque se aprende de otros [...] El sistema de memoria autobiográfica se constituye en una memoria personal y social. Esta doble función permite no sólo proteger los recuerdos privados, sino también compartirlos con los demás, así como construir y recordar historias compartidas. (Ruiz-Vargas 2002: 64).

Middleton and Woods also call attention to this fact:

It is more fruitful to argue [...] that we would do well to direct more attention to the degree to which the workings of both individual and social memory rely on such collectively-shared expectations about how memory works and what it can provide. (2000: 91)

On the commonest practices of collective memory under Francoism, Ruiz-Vargas observes that they involved institutionalized politics of terror and silence:

La España del terror legal e institucionalizado en la que hubieron de elaborar su derrota moral los perdedores –donde el rencor, la venganza, el espionaje y la delación, el acoso de todo tipo, la humillación y el escarnio se convirtieron en el lenguaje preferido de gran parte de los “adictos al régimen”– no sólo no proporcionó las condiciones mínimas para facilitar la recomposición de sus vidas, sino que, al estar profundamente impregnada en la mente de todos los españoles de un significado fratricida, conformó el peor de los escenarios para tal fin. Un ambiente así, que rezumaba odio y rencor por todos sus poros, sólo podía garantizar una cosa: la cronificación del sufrimiento. Además, esa perversa dinámica social estaba inserta en un país castigado por la pobreza, el hambre, las cartillas de racionamiento, la escasez de recursos sanitarios y médicos, unos índices de mortalidad muy altos y un clima general de miedo y silencio. Todo parecía diseñado, en fin, para mantener abiertas perpetuamente en los derrotados sus heridas y un sentimiento de humillación y vergüenza, y en los vencedores la sensación permanente de estar librando a la patria de “las fuerzas satánicas que anidan en la especie humana”. (2006: 29; my emphasis)

In an article significantly titled “Culpabilidad, miedo y silencio histórico”, Vicenç Navarro claims that:

El terror que la dictadura instauró fue enorme y alcanzó un nivel de crueldad con pocos equivalentes en Europa, y se establecieron no sólo campos de concentración, sino también de exterminio, todavía desconocidos en España. (2005: 3)

All this terror was a project of violence in order to impose silence on the defeated by way of extirpating their memory: “Collective memory in Spain has been formed through

an attempt by the dictatorship to extirpate the sense of history once possessed by those who became 'the defeated'" (Richards 1998: 2).

A general atmosphere of fear and silence can be shared by a whole society. Marina (2006) has pointed out that it can even become a social illness and that it is, in fact, a socially lived emotion.<sup>24</sup> Trauma, an individual experience, can nevertheless affect a whole society. As Ruiz-Vargas states:

La Guerra civil española, además de a los ciudadanos, dejó traumatizada y enferma a toda la sociedad española. La política de terror y silencio impuesta durante la dictadura creó el escenario capaz de generar una verdadera epidemia de estrés postraumático. (2006: 3)

Terror, one of the dominant features of Franco's Spain, was the result of an effective policy of extermination. Silence, in turn, be it psychological or sociological, can be understood in two ways. In the first place, as a void lying at the heart of traumatic memory. And, second, as political repression. Added to the silence inherent in post-Civil War traumas, there was an imposed silence, equally traumatic and traumatizing, which consisted of the cancellation of any signs of inflicted damage. As a consequence, the memory of the Civil War and its dramatic consequences were not elaborated in an equal manner to all parts, which resulted in trauma persisting throughout the dictatorship.

Therefore, many victims were stripped of the possibility of healing, as Ruiz-Vargas notes:

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<sup>24</sup> There are important contemporary thinkers that have written about social "pathologies". An universally known precedent is Freud (1930). Another example is Erich Fromm (1956). Foucault (1971) has also written on madness and other issues from a social perspective. Ricoeur calls attention to the problems that inhere in the application of "categories forged in the analytical colloquy to collective memory" (2006: 69).

Porque aquellas víctimas derrotadas, a diferencia de los vencedores, que usaron e incluso abusaron de su derecho a llorar y a honrar a sus “caídos”, se vieron obligadas a tragar sus lágrimas y su dolor, a ocultar o renegar de sus ideas, a sentir vergüenza de su condición ideológica, a autoimponerse el más férreo de los silencios; en definitiva, a ahogar su propia memoria y con ella toda posibilidad de elaboración, duelo y superación de los horrores de la guerra. (2006: 6)

As a result of this imposition of silence on the vanquished side, “[...] the civil war of the 1930s and its repressive aftermath have not yet been effectively absorbed and understood as a collective experience”. What is more, “mourning [...] was consequently mostly very privately” (Richards 2006: 4 and 101).

Even if Ruiz-Vargas and Richards see the possibility of mourning, at least in regard to the case of the Spanish “losses”, other thinkers, such as Butler are, generally speaking, more skeptical that this process can be carried out in relation to the dead who are victims of violence:

There is something else that one cannot “get over,” one cannot “work through,” which is the deliberate act of violence against a collectivity, humans who have been rendered anonymous for violence and whose death recapitulates an anonymity for memory. Such violence cannot be “thought,” constitutes an assault on thinking, negates thinking in the mode of recollection and recovery. (2003: 468)

If thought is impossible, as Butler claims, or extremely difficult to articulate under traumatic circumstances, censorship only problematizes the situation further. According to Octavio Paz, all societies and cultures (the two are not necessarily coincident) have at



all times imposed, tacitly or violently, a particular set of constrictions—some of them are social, some are political—when it comes to freedom of speech, and such a thing is, he asserts, ineluctably connected with poetry:

En toda sociedad funciona un sistema de prohibiciones y autorizaciones [...] lo que se puede decir y lo que no se puede decir. [...] El sistema de autorizaciones y prohibiciones implícitas ejerce su influencia sobre los autores a través de los lectores. Un autor no leído es un autor víctima de la peor censura. [...] La poesía, cualquiera que sea el contenido manifiesto del poema, es siempre una trasgresión de la racionalidad y la moralidad de la sociedad burguesa [...] la poesía es, por naturaleza, extemporánea. (1983: 15-16)

The extemporaneity of poetry, its conveying that which is displaced in time (which is also to say the state of not having an adequate audience or interlocutors that would listen to and respond to poets who speak of and to an era), is a striking feature of the literature produced in certain societies at very specific times, and post-Civil War Spain is one of these particular cases. The sense of uprootedness or groundlessness, at the core of any experience of exile, conditioned not only those poets and writers who abandoned Spain due to the Civil War; for exiled are also the things or the people that cannot be represented or given a place in collective memory. The writer Suso de Toro recognized that having to live under the censorial aegis of a dictatorship led to an unhealthy attitude toward the past: “aceptamos la prohibición de saber” and, therefore, the human rights to search for historical truth and to mourn were withdrawn. Prohibited knowledge is that which lacks socially sanctioned forms of comprehension and representation, that which cannot be named and, let alone, known and explained. Literature speaks what is most

unspeakable: “Y, después de todo, ya que aceptamos la prohibición de saber, les corresponde a los personajes literarios decir lo que nos está prohibido” (2006: 16).

## 2. Theoretical frameworks

### 2.1 Towards a definition of memory: cognitive, philosophic and literary views

*En todas estas actividades [el arte, la moral, la ciencia] creadoras buscamos,  
descubrimos, inventamos, construimos desde la memoria.*

(Marina, *Teoría de la inteligencia creadora*)

*Le role de la mémoire dans la creation artistique est généralement sous-estimé.*

(Tzvetan Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*)

In literature memory has often been identified with mere recalling. Accordingly, only genres with a strong referential background, such as the historical novel and the genre of memoir, have been regarded as epitomizing “the literature of memory”.<sup>25</sup> However, such a conception of memory tends to rigidify it by identifying memory with a mere theme.<sup>26</sup> To be sure, it is one thing to fictionalize any historical or autobiographical events of the past; an altogether different matter, and one with which this thesis is concerned is the recognition that literary creation would be impossible without the

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<sup>25</sup> A great deal of modern critical theory of narrative has reacted to this mixture of history and fiction by establishing a neat boundary between them. From the optic of testimonial memory, the fictional and the non-fictional are somehow entwined, the boundary between them is blurred.

<sup>26</sup> This is the case with Paloma Lapuerta Amigo’s (1994) work on Félix Grande’s poetry.

intervention of memory, as many authors themselves recognize. Antonio Muñoz Molina, for instance, has declared that: “La literatura está hecha de memoria [...] y digo que está hecha de, y no que tiene que ver con o trata de la memoria” (1997: 57).

However, memory has only (relatively) recently received attention. Moreover, the complexity of the phenomenon has often generated controversy. According to Ruiz-Vargas:

Al igual que aceptar ingenuamente que todo el mundo sabe lo que es la atención no garantiza (como ha demostrado la investigación) que se sepa lo que de verdad es la atención, que todo el mundo sepa lo que es la memoria no permite asumir ni que sepamos lo que es realmente la memoria ni que la palabra memoria signifique lo mismo para todo el mundo. (1997a: 9)

In his opinion, to be able to say something meaningful about memory we need an interdisciplinary approach:

El conocimiento de los todavía enigmáticos mecanismos de la memoria así como de su funcionamiento sólo será posible haciendo converger programas de investigación de distintos niveles de análisis y opiniones e ideas procedentes del más amplio abanico científico y cultural [...] Las claves –en una palabra– que sobre la memoria nos brinda el neurobiólogo, el filósofo, el novelista, el psicólogo social, el psicólogo experimental o el experto en teoría literaria. (1997: 12-13)

This lack of understanding of memory has led to incorrect assumptions, according to contemporary research, on what memory is and the role it occupies in our mental processes. Memory’s underestimation has remote roots. Todorov reminds us that

Descartes claimed that memory was not necessary for the progress of science (1995a: 21). Memory only began to be examined seriously at the end of the nineteenth century, from the point of view of its pathological aspects by French experimental psychologists. It was at that time that memory was also gaining attention as a metaphysical issue due to a debate initiated by the philosopher Henri Bergson and the psychiatrist Pierre Janet. Besides, some studies were being carried out in Germany by Hermann Ebbinghaus, and in America the psychologist William James was doing significant research on memory.

Bergson, Janet and James explored what experimental psychologists refused to address, since they were absorbed in the pragmatic approach of figuring out what memory is and how it works under normal conditions. They explored, among other things, the links between memory and consciousness and the relationship between conscious and unconscious memory. But the genuine interest in memory came in the second half of the twentieth century, when memory studies flourished. Today memory is generating more attention than ever, including in literature, where a diverse range of perspectives are being used to approach the theme. Suzanne Nalbantian's books (1994 and 2003), for instance, have aroused increasing attention with her findings regarding the relation of memory's manifestations in works of art and neuroscience. This interest in exploring memory from different perspectives has become the norm.<sup>27</sup> An increasing number of literary critics are

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<sup>27</sup> I claim that memory in literature can be approached from different viewpoints. One of these perspectives is "intertextuality". But intertextuality, literary history and its tradition are not to be confused with a phenomenon that includes these forms of memory but which is nevertheless vaster and more complex. Umberto Eco (1992) has also coined the expression "memoria vegetale" to allude to the same idea and to distinguish it from other kinds of memory. On some occasions, as illustrated by Eco's terminology, memory is understood exclusively in that way. Pérez Parejo, after declaring that "muchos escritores contemporáneos reconocen que la intertextualidad es una clave compositiva de primer orden en la creación", quotes the critic

realizing that in order to approach memory in literature the knowledge about memory gained from “extra-literary” disciplines can prove very useful. In relation to textual memory, Middleton and Woods have declared that:

Cognitive psychology has always treated memory as a central feature of mental activity [...] Literary theory has, mistakenly in our view, treated cognitive psychology with indifference or contempt probably based on both ignorance and misunderstanding of its aims and achievements. [...] Our argument is that cognitive psychology, as much as psychoanalysis, is based on the extensive observation of individual and social practices of memory and, therefore, provides a useful source of material on the recent history of memory for the study of contemporary literary texts. (Middleton and Woods 2000: 84-45)

In this section I will offer a brief overview of what memory is and what it implies in the light of insights from the disciplines of cognitive psychology and philosophy, whilst

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Senabre as saying that “el poeta es, antes que poeta, lector de poesía”, and that “todo poeta se inserta en una tradición, y sobre este fondo de sus lecturas comienza a elaborar sus obras, por lo que bien puede afirmarse que la poesía es, en buena medida, un producto de la memoria” (2002: 139). Pérez Parejo furthermore discusses memory in the poetry of Gil de Biedma in the poet’s use of intertextuality (2002: 424). Senabre’s conclusion, that poetry is a product of memory, seems correct, but not only for the reasons he suggests. There is more to an author’s creative process than his “textual” memories. Poetry may also emerge from memories other than literary memories. Intertextuality does not offer a full understanding of what memory is and of how it works in literary texts. Categories other than the textual are involved. Some critics tend readily to forget that there is a consciousness behind the act of writing. Questions of agency and signature should not therefore be withdrawn. With respect to this, Middleton and Woods go as far as suggesting that intertextuality “steals” from other texts: given the demonstrated link between memory and identity, it would constitute, in their opinion, a “robbery” of someone else’s identity (2000: 93). I would not necessarily endorse such an opinion, but I agree with them that the study of memory in literature does not always have to be intertextual and that it can benefit from the insights of “extra-literary” disciplines.

supporting and illustrating my points with comments by literary critics and writers. My aim is to present an outline of widely-shared knowledge on the subject that will serve as a point of departure for the successive topics discussed, and for subsequent analyses of memory in the work of Grande.

Current research has demonstrated that memory, be it artistic or not, is a question of reconstruction and transfiguration of reality, inner or exterior. As contemporary research stresses, memory not only emerges when it passively recalls the past:

Tulving argues that the subjective conviction that memory is simply a system of retrieving impressions of the past is a poor basis for theorising a mechanism of memory retrieval. (Middleton and Woods 2000: 90-91)

More importantly, memory actively re-constructs the past, according to criteria which have to do with an author's readings as much as they have with his lived experience. Experts have noted that memory is not merely a passive receptacle of information (Marina 1998: 118-133). Its function as a storage system is certainly one of its fundamental tasks, but not the sole one. Three main processes can be distinguished in the workings of memory: encoding, storage and recalling (Ricoeur 2000: 150). These processes are also known as encoding, consolidation and retrieval (Schooler and Eich 2000: 388). Thus the obsolete idea that identifies memory with capacity of retention has been left aside to allow for a more dynamic and accurate view of it, which is also connected with a much debatable literary vision of memory as a theme.

When we leave aside an idea of memory that amounts to merely storage capacity, we can actually begin to relate it to intelligence. Marina puts it in no uncertain terms:

“Creo que no es posible decir nada sensato de la memoria humana sin situarlo dentro de una teoría general de la inteligencia” (1997: 34). But he insists that intelligence and memory are better understood as dynamic processes or functions, rather than objects (1998: 118-133). This distinction is important because besides being a concrete representation, memory is also a set of dynamic mechanisms which create representations. More specifically:

Memory involves a remarkable amalgamation of distinct processes that are differentially elicited as a function of the specific circumstances surrounding event encoding, consolidation and retrieval. (Schooler and Eich 2000: 388)

Thus, memory as a mental function (“recordar”) is to be distinguished from its product (“recuerdo”), as Antonio Machado accurately and intuitively indicates in the following four lines:

Cuando recordar no pueda,  
¿dónde mi recuerdo irá?  
Una cosa es el recuerdo  
y otra cosa recordar. (2003: 139)

To be sure, memory is not only the product, what we remember, the content, that is, the memories, but, more significantly, our memory is how we remember and this “how” is constituted by the influence that a varying array of circumstances exert on the processes of encoding, consolidation and retrieval mentioned above.

Memory is, thus, a set of cognitive processes that in its most developed form (that is, in its narrative form; memory is, in fact, a kind of narration, as will be seen) is very closely linked with intelligence.<sup>28</sup> Its functions intersect with those commonly attributed to thought and the act of narrating: selecting information and interpreting it according to diverse criteria, as shown by Todorov's definition of memory:

La mémoire ne s'oppose nullement à l'oubli. Les deux termes qui forment contraste sont l'effacement et la conservation. La mémoire est toujours et nécessairement, une interaction des deux. La mémoire est forcément une sélection. [...] Tout travail sur le passé, ne consiste jamais seulement à établir des faits, mais aussi à choisir certains d'entre eux comme étant plus saillants et plus significatifs que d'autres, à les mettre ensuite en relation entre eux. (1995: 50)

Umberto Eco reflects on the functions of memory and reinforces Todorov's point:

La memoria ha due funzioni. Una, ed è quella a cui tutti pensano, è quella di trattenerne nel ricordo i dati della nostra esperienza precedente; ma l'altra è anche quella di filtrarli, di lasciarne cadere alcuni e di conservare altri. (1992: 9)

Some critics claim that the politics of memory are opposed to the politics of forgetting. However, the categories in opposition are not memory and forgetting but conservation and cancellation. To be more precise, re-enacting must not be confused with forgetting. Acting out is a process of remembrance associated with trauma whereby an

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<sup>28</sup> Although in special circumstances, as in trauma, as will be seen further on, memory does not involve cognition, but, rather, inhibits it. When the origins of historical and personal catastrophe are so remote that it is almost impossible to find them, knowledge derived from logical reasoning in the form of historical or philosophical logos is barren, giving way to another ways of alternative knowledge: the arts.



event or sets of events have not yet entered into the stream of memory. Strictly speaking, forgetting is still related to memory, for we cannot forget that which has not been first constituted as memory, that is, stored (Ruiz-Vargas 2002). One cannot “forget” trauma, in the same way that one forgets a memory.<sup>29</sup>

Let us see now how memory processes find their correlates in artistic processes. For instance, this is Antonio Muñoz Molina’s opinion. On being asked about his craft, his explanation of what the act of narration entails coincides with Eco’s and Todorov’s statements above as to how memory functions. Muñoz Molina associates perception, selection and retrieval (all processes of memory) with literary creation:

Escribir es primero el arte de mirar [perception] y luego de seleccionar [where stored memory intervenes], en su tercer paso, el definitivo, es un arte combinatorio [this is where the explanatory and interpretative power of narrative memory takes place].  
(1997: 24)

The shared vision of Todorov, Eco and Muñoz Molina merits a comment. They all affirm that memory is founded on selection. It is in this sense that we must take Todorov’s insistence that memory is not to be used in opposition to oblivion but to conservation. Oblivion refers us to memory as well, for where there is oblivion there is also memory. This is a fundamental finding by Saint Augustine: “When at least we

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<sup>29</sup> This is the reason behind Pierre Nora’s observation that too much memory amounts to no memory at all (1998: I, 7). Excessive recalling of the same event or set of events might be a sign of trauma. Cancellation, along with the fixation on certain memories, is to be associated with especial mechanisms of memory occurring in specific circumstances, as in the case of trauma. “One of the common paradoxes of characterizations of traumatic memories—why they are sometimes retrieved excessively and other times not recalled at all” (Schooler and Eich 2000: 388).

remember ourselves to have forgotten, we have not totally forgotten. But if we have completely forgotten, we cannot even search for what has been lost” (1991: 196), and one which the poet Luis Cernuda rediscovers in his poetry (“el recuerdo de un olvido” [1993: 199] ).

What does not seem to be very clear is how the selection process takes place. According to contemporary research, and as observed by Muñoz Molina above in regard to literary creation, it is known that memory and perception are inextricably connected. We also know that selection occurs at two different levels: at the level of perception (memory is, then, forming itself) and at the retrieval of memory. On the one hand, memory intervenes at the moment of perception, which means that new information is integrated and interpreted by previous information (semantic nets or structures which constitute the very basics of memory; some of which are innate to human beings, making it possible to assimilate new information. These are also called “schemes” in psychological terminology).<sup>30</sup> Without these previous semantic structures nothing could signify. And it seems that these structures are susceptible to being modified. In fact they are modifiable by the incorporation of new information, that is, they cannot be regarded as fixed structures (Marina 1998: 132).

On the other hand, memory selects when it remembers, according to different criteria and guiding principles, amongst which, as shall be seen, are attention, desire,

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<sup>30</sup> Marina calls these structures or semantic nets (1997: 39). Middleton and Woods similarly argue that there are no neutral memories, they are always associated to something else: “memory derives its contents, its informational ingredients, not only from the traces (engrams) but from the retrieval cue as interpreted by the semantic system and the general cognitive environment in which the retrieval occurs” (2000: 21).

habit, and so on. Thus perceiving could be said to be a sort of remembering and remembering a kind of perceiving of the past. As Bergson states, “Your perception, however instantaneous, consists then in an incalculable multitude of remembered elements; in truth, every perception is already memory” (1988: 150). Perceptions and recollections are only different in their degree of intensity (Bergson 1988: 236).

What is interesting to note is that, either at the level of the formation of memory or at the level of its retrieval, both the content and the nature of these memory structures seem to decide what pieces of information or facts are “les plus saillants et plus significatifs” (to use Todorov’s words) in order for them to be stored (in the formation of memory, at the act of perception) or remembered (in the retrieval of memory). Just as memory in some way decides what will be perceived (that which will constitute the centre of attention, what we “see”), it also decides that which will be remembered. This is of utmost importance as it entails that memory is not only retrospective but also prospective. Further on, this point will be illustrated with a passage taken from one of Valente’s short essays on memory. Here, suffice it to say that if it is true that memory structures influence perception and remembering, it is also fair to point out that according to some memory studies, stimuli set selection into motion. The latter, however, is not always regarded as a plausible theory. As Marina puts it:

Los estudiosos de la memoria pecan de ingenuos al hablar de temas como el “reconocimiento” o “la búsqueda de la memoria”. Les parece evidente que un estímulo activa las estructuras, las redes semánticas, o como quiera llamárselas, que constituyen la memoria. Debo de ser muy torpe, porque no comparto esas claridades. Se dice que un estímulo es comprendido utilizando información de más alto nivel. ¿Cómo se hace

esto? ¿Va el estímulo en busca del recuerdo oportuno? Eso es concebible en un ordenador, donde toda información lleva un puntero que la dirige hacia la memoria correspondiente. Si la memoria espera y el estímulo –aún sin interpretar- busca, me resulta imposible explicar el encuentro. [...] no es el nuevo input quien va en busca de la memoria, sino la memoria quien va en busca del estímulo. (1997: 38)

Muñoz Molina's experience as a writer confirms Marina's words:

Uno tiende a ver no lo que tiene delante de los ojos, sino aquello que está dispuesto a ver y adiestrado para distinguir. Uno suele encontrar los recuerdos que previamente buscaba y creyendo ser un memorialista está actuando como un fabulador. (1997: 62)

With “aquello que está dispuesto a ver y adiestrado para distinguir” Molina appears to be suggesting that the elements seen (perceived) and what is remembered are equally determined by desire, interest and habit, all of which engage with inner memory structures. Todorov similarly argues that selection does not occur arbitrarily by external stimuli. On the contrary, he declares, it is linked to internal principles which guide it: will, reason, creativity, and so on. (1995: 25). In fact, this seems to be the case: memory is not always capricious as in the spontaneous recollection of Proust's involuntary memory. Bergson had this in mind when he distinguished between “pure memory” (*mémoire-souvenir*) and “habit memory” (*mémoire-habitude*). Ricoeur also referred (2000: 144) to “labored recall”, the result of a conscious effort of memory.<sup>31</sup> Thus from the perspective

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<sup>31</sup> “Another pair of terms concerns the relation between spontaneous recollection and more or less labored recall: one pole is represented by Proust's involuntary memory; the other by an effort of memory, which is a type of intellectual effort and which reduces neither to the association of empiricist tradition nor to calculation. This effort involves what Bergson and Merleau-Ponty call a

of how memories are generated we can talk about different types of memory. Or, more precisely, memory equally engages with unconscious and conscious elements, with willed and involuntary influences.

There are also different kinds of memory according to their level of evolution. In relation to memory evolution, Janet distinguishes between “description”, an elementary type of memory and “narration”, the linguistic and most developed process of memory whereby selected elements are put into relation with one another. He asserts that descriptive and narrative memories are not capricious, but that they are connected with something else—what he calls “la question” precedes them (1928: 245):

[Le sujet adulte] a dépassé depuis longtemps le commencement de la mémoire. Il nous présente une mémoire éduquée, métamorphosée par toutes les opérations de croyance, de raisonnement qui s’y sont superposées. (1928: 258)

It seems, then, that memory is subordinated to beliefs and particular ways of reasoning. Seen in this light, the exercise of memory can be exchanged with the practice of a worldview. Internal stimuli are really powerful. It must be noted that many of the external stimuli that trigger the mechanism of memory are internalized, becoming inner stimuli.<sup>32</sup>

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'dynamic schema' capable of directing memory searches by discarding inappropriate candidates and recognizing the 'right' memory” (2000: 144).

<sup>32</sup> Changeux talks of “traces of history and culture internalized in our encephalon” (in Ricoeur 2000: 136-137).

Memory is, thus, as much guided by reason and beliefs as it is driven by irrationality and emotion. Emotional components embedded in memories are central to the way we remember:

Memories are in fact often associated with emotional markers: memory traces are evaluated as a function of the pleasure, happiness, our unhappiness, or suffering that the subject anticipates. (Ricoeur 2000: 14)

The fact that memory is linked to our variable emotions has led artists of all kinds to consider memory as an unreliable source for the seeking of truth. Yet as Orhan Pamuk observes in the following passage, that memory changes according to emotion, does not necessarily mean it is false:

I remember how troubled I was the first time I looked at this same view [of Istanbul] from the same angle and notice how different the view looks now. It's not my memory that's false – the view looked troubled then because I myself was troubled. I poured my soul in the city's streets and there it still resides. (2005: 313)

This association of memory with emotion links memory to the body:

It is a self of flesh and blood that we remember, with its moments of pleasure and suffering, its status, its actions, its feelings. (Ricoeur 2000: 145)

The governance of memory by emotions also supports the already mentioned idea that memory is not only retrospective but also prospective, in the sense that emotion can turn into a guiding principle of poetic writing and remembering. Still, the kind of memory encoded in sensations or perceptions is still a less developed (but not less important) form

of memory if compared to narrative memory.<sup>33</sup> We must admit thus that sensations, perceptions, feeling, suffering are forms of memory and therefore types of intelligence, that is, methods of knowledge.

The processes of memory and those of literary creation are especially akin to each other. Expanding on this argument, a series of authors' predicaments show how the processes of non-literary memory and those of literary creation converge. What theorists—philosophers and psychologists—have demonstrated, has also been intuitively apprehended by writers.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is worth quoting a poet who has clearly seen that the processes of memory and those of creation tend to coincide. In the following passage Valente comments on how memory imbricates with the process of poetic creation:

El descenso hacia los fondos de la memoria por las capas infinitas en que se va abriendo la interioridad de la palabra constituye la operación fundamental de la poesía, a la que tampoco es ajena, desde sus orígenes, la filosofía misma. Me parece importante señalar a este propósito que la memoria es, justamente, el vasto territorio de lo que aún no recordamos. (2004: 163)

Such a statement constitutes a lucid vision not only of how poetic creation is supposed to work; it also offers a precise and rigorous account of how memory is configured. The allusion to “fondos”, which could be rendered in English as “layers”, for

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<sup>33</sup> I will be using, along with Kristeva (1994: 281), the concepts of perception and sensation as interchangeable.

<sup>34</sup> Some critics indeed blur the distinction between theory and literature. Christine Boheemen-Saff proposes to “turn theory into a form of literature”, she finds that important because she “wants to reclaim the importance of literature as a socially necessary source of knowledge, especially in its *affective demand* to witness literature’s occasion” (1999: 10). Conversely, literature can be thought as developing its own particular body of “theory” even if theory is not its purpose.

“fondos” is a term that in the plural alludes to multiple levels of deepness, is extremely pertinent here in relation to both memory and words. It has been demonstrated that memory consists of various levels or layers, in the same way as words possess different layers or connotations. Ruiz-Vargas (2002: 60-66) explains that experts have widely recognized four levels or layers of memory, namely, phylogenetic, semantic, autobiographic and cultural. They correspond to different phases in the constitution of our memory. The deepest or least developed layer of memory, phylogenetic, affects the more superficial or developed levels, although these cannot influence the phylogenetic layer but only attempt to “reach” it.

This is important because memories recorded in the least superficial levels of memory such as, for instance, unconscious traumatic memories, can end up interfering with linguistically elaborated conscious memories. Furthermore, it proves that memory can also be non-linguistic, although, paradoxically, language can be a means for hinting at non-linguistic memories (Ruiz-Vargas 2002: 62-64). The latter, scientifically demonstrated, is also suggested in Valente’s passage. The first sentence of the above passage points out that our immediate access to the different layers of memory takes place through language. The poetic word opens up so its interiority can be displayed. This interiority, according to the poet, constitutes memory itself. Valente also hints at the idea that underlying the word’s surface there is a less conscious, a more obscure realm of memory which poetry in its making displays. This can be understood in two ways which are, perhaps, inseparable. On the one hand, it can be understood from the perspective of psychoanalysis, for which poetry could be conceived of, and according to Valente’s passage above, as the unfolding of unconscious memory welling up progressively



uncensored and unbidden. For Freud unconscious or buried memory is connected with the repressed elements of our psyche. Similarly, Henri Bergson referred to the spontaneous images that memory brings out: “images-éclairs qui traversent l’esprit tout d’un coup par association d’idées et qui ne se rattachent pas à ce que nous faisons” (Janet 1928: 242).

Yet, more significantly, the passage above may be taken as referring to genuine imaginative creation. Not creation as a surrogate function to let repressed feelings emerge, but as the fundamental operation of literature. Valente’s sentence “Me parece importante señalar [...] que la memoria es, justamente, el vasto territorio de lo que aún no recordamos” as well as his observation that “preñada está de olvido la memoria que, a su vez, sólo de él ha nacido” (2004: 125), is a paradoxical as well as illuminating recognition of literature’s attempts to overcome silence and oblivion. From this perspective the function of poetry consists in descending to the vast territory of oblivion. Yet oblivion is alluded to here indirectly in terms of memory (“lo que aún no recordamos”). In other words, there is a subtle nuance between what we do not remember and what we do not yet remember.

The question to be posed is how memory might conquer that which is not already remembered but is bound to be remembered. The answer could lie in the idea that memory is the possibility of creating sense among senseless and scattered elements, oblivion being a kind of pre-memory, that is, a possibility to be created anew. Conversely, it can be said that all memory is a kind of oblivion, for the very act of remembering is a re-construction that resists accurate seizure of the thing past. Ruiz-Vargas reminds us that oblivion can only be understood in two ways: forgetfulness, that is, loss of conscious seizure of stored information (this is the psychoanalytic aspect of oblivion) and creation,

that is, the distortion of existing memory traces adding something new or creating anew memories. Thus perceptions not stored in the long-run memory cannot be properly considered oblivion.

Valente's words can be taken as suggesting that memory through poetic language does not invent or create *ex-nihilo* but discovers new possibilities and nuances which hitherto remain undiscovered or unnoticed. He refers to literature as the conquest of oblivion via the creation of memory and to the distortion and re-interpretation embedded in its exercise. Such a paradox can nevertheless illuminate the complex and ambivalent reality of the phenomenon of memory.

A more straightforward but nevertheless subtle example of the relation of memory and creation is produced by Muñoz Molina. In regard to the intertwining of the processes of memory and creation he states:

En el acto de escribir, como en la conciencia diaria de cualquiera, inventar y recordar son tareas que se parecen mucho y de vez en cuando se confunden entre sí. La memoria está inventando de manera incesante nuestro pasado, según los principios de selección y de combinación. (1992: 30)

As the selective and associative tasks of memory have already been explained, the paragraph above does not need further explanation. Yet the parallelism Molina establishes between the act of remembering and that of creation is significant. His description of his experience as a writer also displays how the unconscious levels of memory might become not only enriching and creative but also enormously revelatory of his own life experience.

That is, experience may be graspable more appropriately through fiction. He has referred to the:

Hallazgo de una revelación súbita e instintiva que salve del olvido, restituya el pasado al presente y permita una comprensión limpia, apasionada y exacta de la propia vida.  
(1997: 62)

Inspirational as they might be, the upsurge of these images and instinctive revelations is not all that can be said to constitute creation. Creative memory can be mainly involuntary and unconscious, as in the *Recherche* by Marcel Proust. In the same vein mourning, a concept which will be addressed in the second part of this thesis, sets into motion involuntary memory and the melancholic type of attachment to the lost object of trauma perpetuates it instead of confronting it.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, as Muñoz Molina observes: “La memoria cree antes de que el conocimiento recuerde” (1997: 66). There is a voluntary side to memory. For Toni Morrison, for instance, memory is a form of willed creation (1996: 213).

To summarize, memory is a set of complex cognitive processes. There are various modalities of memory, the most developed of which are linguistic and closely linked to intelligence and perception. Memory directs the artist’s vision of the artistic object he is creating according to certain criteria, which either are related to inner stimuli or external stimuli. Finally, memory processes and those of literary creation are interwoven and that

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<sup>35</sup> This is what has prompted Alessia Ricciardi to affirm that the *Recherche* is a “failure” in terms of mourning due to its lack of coming to terms with the pain of loss (2003: 119).

memory implies conscious and unconscious states, that is, involuntary and willed elements.

## **2.2 Trauma and its relation to memory and literature (especially poetry)**

*All memory works through trauma [...] All memory is generated by traumas of varying force.*

(Middleton and Woods, *Literatures of Memory*)

There is an inextricable connection between memory and trauma. Still, one should be able to distinguish between memory as a set of cognitive functions, known as “working memory”, and the “special” memory whose distinctive processes necessarily spring from the condition of trauma. In the first case memory should be specifically understood, as explained in 2.1, as a set of cognitive functions proper to intelligence which involve perception, selection, assimilation and retrieval. It is important to insist that memory under “normal” circumstances implies production of meaning, because in trauma what occurs precisely is exactly the opposite: the display of no meaning.

Trauma is defined as a psychic wound—although its Greek etymon alludes to a physical wound—originating from certain experiences of the self which have not been integrated into consciousness, and which, as a result, haunt the self as a ghost or absence whose meaning cannot be deciphered in normal processes of cognition. As Cathy Caruth

argues, trauma involves much suffering, patterns of repetition and belatedness in the grasping of the event's meaning:

Trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetition of the traumatic event [...] thus suggests a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known. (1996: 92)

As Caruth observes in the last lines of her statement, the fact that a traumatic event is not fully assimilated does not imply, as a non-traumatic functioning of memory would suggest, that the event lacks relevance for the individual who has experienced it, for memory selects that which is most significant for a given individual. It rather means the opposite: that the event or sets of events have impacted on the individual to such a great extent that a kind of short circuit in cognition has taken place, leaving the event outside the stream of consciousness and preventing its assimilation into memory. Thus the event (or events) are not interpreted and absorbed as meaning. As a consequence, trauma does not cease to return as something fixed, unmodifiable, and excluded from the eventual possibility of being elaborated as meaning. In other words, the event returns as mere repetition but not as memory proper. According to Anne Whitehead, "trauma emerges as that which, at the very moment of its reception, registers as a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter" (2004: 5). In Ann Kaplan's words, trauma is not a

cognitive experience; it only produces emotions because the affect that it provokes “is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain” (2004: 34).

Trauma is, therefore, a “special” kind of memory without semantic meaning, characterized either by dissociative and belated repetition or by repression.<sup>36</sup> As observed in the Introduction, Pierre Janet showed the difference between memory and repetition by distinguishing four different phases in the psychological evolution of human memory. These phases are, from the most primitive to the most developed, repetition, recitation, description and narration. “Narrative memory” is the maximum degree of development achieved by memory, whilst repetition is the stage in which something is merely stored as “raw” information, and, therefore, cannot be recalled in the context of a narrative. Repetition is, thus, deprivation of a “context”, of a narrative framework. Hence trauma cannot be thematized, that is, it is not easily reducible to an event or a set of events, for if it were to be thematized, it would be put into narrative terms, opening up the possibility of its (extremely difficult) overcoming.

The presence of trauma can be traced not only in the occurrence of traumatic memories; it is precisely the absence of them which more appropriately reveals it. Described as a gap or breach in consciousness, it is nevertheless readable as a structure or

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<sup>36</sup> Some critics have seen problems in defining trauma as a dissociative process and have asked whether the unconscious has a place in trauma. Due to the latter, Ann Kaplan (2005), for instance, criticizes Caruth’s assumption that dissociation is central to trauma. Nevertheless, Caruth clearly states in her work that traumatic memories can be either dissociated or repressed. So, it seems that in trauma dissociation and the unconscious may co-exist. LaCapra (2001) warns that we should distinguish between the loss associated with historically-rooted trauma and the ontological absence linked to the unconscious. In Grande’s work both historical loss and ontological absence occur. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that there is a small group of researchers who do not consider traumatic memory to have special mechanisms. However, given the unique nature of trauma, School and Erich argue that the latter is unlikely (2000: 387).

pattern whereby a certain sort of “experience” is conveyed (even if it is that of absence of sense). That is, trauma emerges as that which is inapprehensible, and whose ungraspability can nevertheless be tracked down through language. If one is to be rigorous it cannot be asserted that traumatic memory falsifies meaning or distorts history; for trauma constitutes the history itself, telling its own truth. As Caruth puts it: “The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (1995: 5). In other words, trauma is the experience attached to history that history misses; it is that which history cannot absorb: “if trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence” (Anne Whitehead 2004: 7).

With respect to this Todorov (1995II) asks: “Doit-on conclure, [...] que la mémoire individuelle est inutilisable pour la connaissance?” Todorov poses the question as to whether it makes sense to consider the epistemological value of individual recollection. In other words, he makes us reflect on the validity of testifying to trauma. What traumatic memories lay bare is precisely how they can only be “told” within the context of a sole narrative: the narrative of pain: “c'est dans la souffrance, au contraire, qu'advient le souvenir” (1995II).

Todorov claims that knowledge of the past is produced differently in history and memory, for these two different fields of knowledge touch upon two different segments of experience. The realm of human experience covered by history is quantifiable and factual, whereas memory is occupied with the traces of history in the human spirit.

However, Todorov reminds us that “Celles-ci [the registering of the past in the psyche] n’existent pas moins que les faits matériels” (1995II).

Thus traumatic memory can neither be falsification of history or a mere fictional recourse, for two reasons. Namely, that assimilation into narrative memory is exactly that which has not been produced at the level of the traumatized individual (or society). The unresolved experience of trauma is configured as a breach in cognition. Secondly, trauma is less a matter of what it is said than how it is said. This is why literature is so well equipped to register and deal with trauma. For if trauma cannot be fully put into the words of reason, in order to produce understanding, a catastrophic situation surely can be registered as silence and death. Many critics and artists, Grande himself, defend the appropriateness of approaching literature from the perspective of trauma by observing that imagination can contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon. According to Grande, poets develop in their works extremely intensive and pre-logical emotions whose apprehension would be difficult to achieve through logic and reason:

La razón y la lógica suelen fingir una seguridad que, en rigor, no disponen. Es ese fingimiento lo que rechaza el conocimiento poético. El artista se sabe balbuceante, perplejo, asombrado y, en el fondo, habitando en la inocencia de aquel a quien el mundo sobrecoge y deslumbra. Lo que el artista desarrolla es, en fin, una sabia forma de infancia. Sus emociones prelógicas y generalmente intensísimas, como son las del niño –el niño que todos hemos sido y que, en mayor o menor medida, según sea mayor o menor el arrojo con que acertamos a vivir nuestra intimidad, solemos conservar los adultos. [...] Es iluso aspirar a conocer la realidad en todo su misterio; mas, sin embargo, es posible estrenarla. El poeta nos ayuda a que la realidad sea, también para



nosotros, un estreno. Claro está que eso únicamente es posible cuando el poeta desconfía del autoritarismo de la lógica, cuando asume que las certidumbres de la razón comportan fingimiento —es decir, insinceridad— y cuando, aconsejado por el coraje y la inocencia de su caudal de infancia, resuelve comprometer su vida entera con la aventura misteriosa del conocimiento poético. (cited in Verónica Briaut 1988: 293-294)

In the same vein, Gaston Bachelard observes that “poetry is a commitment of the soul [...] Forces are manifested in poems that do not pass through the circuits of knowledge” (1994: xxi). Valente made a statement that sheds light on the relation between poetry and the experience of trauma—although we presume his was not a reflection on trauma but a general view on poetry: “la palabra poética empieza justamente donde el decir es imposible” (2002: 96). Poetry can certainly be considered as that which registers experiences of incompleteness and impossibility and which nevertheless attempts to unveil these intricate realities. Hence its connections with trauma—an experience that will never be fully told—in seeking to achieve meaning and elaborate understanding, an exacting and endless movement toward gauging a void. In this sense, poetry would not only manifest and work through trauma; taken as an object, poetry is often in itself proof of trauma.

By the same token, Dominick LaCapra has remarked: “[...] certain forms of literature or art may provide a more expansive space for exploring modalities of responding to trauma” (2001: 185). He draws on Cathy Caruth’s reflection that “literature in its very excess can somehow get at trauma in a manner unavailable to theory” (cited in LaCapra 2001: 183). Poetry seeks to pass through the deepest layers of reality, in the

same fashion as bearing with trauma involves going beyond apparent reality: “[...] the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face” (Caruth 1995: vii).

### **2.3 Trauma and exile**

Trauma shares with the experience of exile a common ground: they both tell the story of a displacement. Trauma is, moreover, as much exilic as exile is traumatic. Grande’s poetry can be seen as exilic in his implicit creation of an ethical system that accounts for and is grounded on loss. This consideration would lead us to deem exile not as an exclusively social phenomenon—but, also, as a psychological condition. Exile is central to literature, not necessarily because the life of an exiled writer resembles fiction, a thesis that Michael Ugarte presents in his (1989) work on Spanish Civil-War exile literature, but, rather, because literature gives form to and works through the absence and fragmentation which characterize any experience of exile.

In subtle contraposition to Ugarte’s idea of exile being merely fiction, Cristina Peri Rossi claims that: “Si el exilio no fuera una terrible experiencia humana, sería un género literario. O ambas cosas” (2003: 7).

Neither trauma nor exile can be localized in terms of a place or setting. However, it is germane to note that there is a crucial difference between the sense of displacement provoked by trauma and exile, and the repression carried out by the unconscious. After all, the unconscious, although hidden, is still a place. Trauma is fundamentally dissociative whilst memory operates by association. Traumatic memories do not have

access to consciousness; they do not have a place in it; often, they do not even have a place in the unconscious. Therefore, they cannot be conceived of as merely extra-textual reality, a referent, although they certainly derive from a poet's life experiences: "Trauma cannot be localized in terms of a discrete, dated experience" (LaCapra 2001: 186). The latter does not imply that the referent does not exist but, rather, that the referent is being continually deferred, with absence and silence occupying its "place". To be sure, just as the exile cannot be geographically localized, given his nomadic condition, by the same token trauma lacks a mental place. In fact, there is an inextricable relationship between trauma, exile and silence, the three concepts being intimately bound together.

The condition of exile has been generally applied to the individual who has been forced to leave his homeland. Nevertheless, exile is not always territorial but also a mental condition emerging from situations of intense cultural conflict. Paul Ilie (1980) has studied the condition of inner exile and its consequences for Spanish literature between 1939 and 1975. Ilie points out that much of the literature produced within the territory of Spain during that period is exilic in many aspects. Yet, in order to consider the literature of this period as exilic it is necessary to refute the idea that "exile, in its most basic sense, is a social phenomenon" (Ugarte 1986: 326). According to Ilie, "la falta de atención dirigida al exilio interior entre los críticos, la explico como un ejemplo de la dificultad inherente a la lectura psicológico-exegética frente a la investigación histórico-crítica".<sup>37</sup> In effect, the Spanish literature of exile is often known and studied as a social phenomenon associated with the mass Republican expatriation after the Civil War. Little

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<sup>37</sup> In a letter addressed to me (24-1-2007).

attention has been paid to the exilic condition of poets who inside Spain suffered the repression of Francoism. These writers, among whom Grande is an example, did not emigrate, but they endured “internal dislocation”, to use Ilie’s word (1980: 91). Ilie sees exile as a “psychomoral phenomenon” (1980: 91).<sup>38</sup> What is more, inner exile can be considered to be even more dramatic: “As the example of Grande shows, it is never possible to grow accustomed to spiritual exile in residence as long as the cultural medium exerts an alienating power” (Ilie 1980: 92).

Central to this discussion is the question as to why memory is inextricably connected with the condition of exile. In the case of the exiled Luis Cernuda, memory has been described as “a rootless and seductive force which gradually disrupts rather than unifies his sense of self” (Logan 2006: 298). Such a definition is interesting on its own, irrespective of its applicability to the Spanish poet. As an associative mechanism, memory can restore some coherence to the disintegrating experience of exile. In this sense, the opposite might be argued of memory: that far from disrupting, it constitutes the means for bringing together the pieces of a broken self. Exile prompts the fragmentation of the self, as Claudio Guillén observes:

La persona se desangra. El yo siente como rota o fragmentada su propia naturaleza  
psicosocial, y su participación en los sistemas de signos en que descansa la vida  
cotidiana. (1995: 14)

To reconnect with itself and society the exilic self needs the thread of memory:

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<sup>38</sup> On exile seen from this perspective, apart from the work of Ilie, see Christine Arkininstall (1993). Also interesting are the works of Susana Riviera (1990) and José Ignacio Álvarez Fernández (2007).

For survivors who have been separated and exiled from a ravaged World, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall, but also of mourning, a mourning often inflected by anger, rage, and despair. (Hirsch 1996: 659)

And this is where the link with literature is unavoidable. Michael Ugarte proposes what he calls a “poetics of exile” (1986: 326), by which he means that exile is the condition inherent in all writers. He refers to an “exile’s voice, regardless of a specific culture, its language, its conceits, its motivations” (1986: 236). Even if I would generally agree with Ugarte’s way of understanding exile, his conclusion that exile relates to literature due to the fictional nature of the exilic experience is, however, debatable:

Exile intensifies the tenuousness of the relationship between language and reality, for the life of exile is, in many ways, the life of fiction. Nothing is apprehended without the grid of memory and comparison; naming and re-naming are constant activities. (1986: 237)

To identify exile with fictional memory seems reductive, especially if it does not take into account the fact that exilic poetry does not only create fiction but it also expresses trauma. Exile is an experience whose dramatic psychological and sociological consequences are “real” and they are protruding in literary works. It is a complex phenomenon which is not limited to fiction. As Claudio Guillén claims, “lo propio de nuestro tiempo es la variedad referencial de la palabra exilio, es decir, la diversidad de realidades que denota” (1995: 145). Exile is not only about what is said (the fictional story, or the theme of the poem) but “how” it is said, and the how tells us more, it is more important, than the content itself. If it is true that in some cases the relationship between

language and reality becomes tenuous, it can also be argued, as Ilie does, that the exiled writer, especially the “realistic émigré” (in contrast to the “resident writer”), “has confidence in the faculty of memory, and in its nonaberrational processes”, and considers time a “pure vehicle for understanding and judgment” (1980: 67).<sup>39</sup> An illustrative case of the latter is that of Rafael Alberti. His reliance on memory was unequivocal:

Qué consuelo sin nombre no perder la memoria,  
tener llenos los ojos de los tiempos pasados,  
de las noches aquéllas en que el amor ardía,  
como el único dios que habitaba en los bosques. (2006: 334)

The “exile” way of understanding memory is congruent with an idea presented in the Introduction to this thesis, that memory is a pre-requisite for achieving genuine understanding. In other words, it may be said to be an extreme posture to assume categorically that memory does not intervene in the apprehension of things, or that memory intervenes by distorting reality. Memory Studies suggest that the statement that “nothing is apprehended without the grid of memory” tells a general truth about the question of knowledge acquisition, rather than being exclusively a characteristic of exile. The relationship between literature and the experience of exile might thus be approached not necessarily from the perspective of a disrupting memory, but from a vision of memory which trusts in its ability to reconstructs some coherence where before there was none. Or, at least, to tell the story of a displacement which is the history of trauma.

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<sup>39</sup> It can be said that Alberti holds a happy view of memory. In Grande’s work, notwithstanding his positive view of it, this joy associated with memory found in Alberti’s poetry is somehow toned down.

## 2.4 The Spanish crisis of the word and its implications for memory

*Words failing, memory, which is their confine, breaks also*

*[...]*

*Everything forgets. But not a language*

(George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the*

*Inhuman*)

The modern critique of language can be rendered in Spanish as “la crisis de la palabra”. Steiner has called it with acumen “the retreat from the word” (1982: 12-35).<sup>40</sup> It is difficult to ascertain when this crisis begins. Clodagh J. Brook distinguishes among two trends in this phenomenon:

The rhetorical-literary and the mystical-religious. The first of these, the rhetorical-literary, represents a secular use of the topos which either indicates the speaker’s self-confessed inadequacy and modesty, or is employed to laud a creature who is beyond words. [...] The mystical-religious tradition of ineffability, on the other hand, is associated with religious experience, and its adherents hold that God cannot be expressed because he exists beyond the limits of human reason and language. (2002: 2)

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<sup>40</sup> The expression “the critique of language” is often associated with feminist thinking and with deconstruction and poststructuralist thinking. Here suffice it to say that whereas in feminism the critique of language seems to have played an important role, the Spanish crisis to which I will refer has more to do with a nihilist attitude toward language than with the dismantling of oppression. The critique of language in feminism entails a critique of the Law of the Father implicit in the construction of language, an idea that is absent in my discourse.

Dante is an example of the rhetorical-literary device (Brook makes it clear that this is a literary device). For him, language was neither capable of wholly explaining the divine nor of expressing the phenomenal beauty of Beatrice. Although writers such as Dante commented in their works on the difficulties of conveying certain concepts, in the Middle Ages there was still confidence in language: “language is assumed to be in a position to express something of the divine” (Brook 2002: 3). According to Brook, literary modernism rethought the issue “with regard to the new social and intellectual climate” (2002: 2).

However, there is nevertheless a third trend in this crisis, one that is initiated with modernism and postmodernism and characterized by its association with what remains at the margins of knowledge, because it is repressed and, also, culturally (and politically) silenced. This trend coincides with the discovery of the unconscious. Shoshana Felman situates it in “the age of psychiatry”:

Modernity at large (including postmodernity) can be defined, I argue, by its relation to the age of psychiatry. What, precisely, is the age of psychiatry—the age of the establishment of the hegemony of psychiatric discourse [...] Psychiatry derives according to Foucault, from the age of reason, the age that casts madness outside civilization and outside society by physically confining it, by locking it up within the walls of mental institutions [...] Madness becomes the symptom of a culture, but the symptom is incorporated in a silenced body (and a silenced soul) whose suffering cannot say itself. (2003: 3)

This psychiatric way of thinking the relation between silence and language is the most interesting one for this thesis. For Grande’s work represents a case study of it. While



the literary issue of inexpressibility with regard to the Spanish poetry of the second half of the twentieth century was mainly incarnated in the poetics of silence, on the one hand, and in the discussion about social/culturalist poetry, on the other, the “psychiatric” silence in Grande’s work instantiates a new perspective on the Spanish crisis of language. Silence is also madness, “since the phenomenon of madness, being in its essence *silence*, cannot be rendered, said through logos” (Felman 2003: 46). This new vision of an “old” problematic has not received enough attention by Spanish criticism of poetry. Yet the supposedly inexpressiveness of language transcends “the literary” or, rather, it reformulates it so as to give us a view of the “literary thing” as something far more complex and with ramifications in broader cultural discourses. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to decipher such a crisis of the word in its relation to the psychiatric aspects of Grande’s work.

In the following two sections I set out to discuss the crisis of the word and to revisit the Spanish poetics of silence. I will show how this concept of poetry and of poetry criticism implicit in the poetics of silence is of very limited value when interpretation of a psychoanalytic dimension of silence is needed (the psychic aspect of silence is often found in poetry, but it is also overwhelmingly overlooked by critics). Highlighting the deficiencies that underpin the poetics of silence’s theoretical grounds is necessary, in order to show the differences with respect to my own vantage point. Finally, I will deal with the implications of the crisis and how it degraded the view poets held of memory.

The crisis of the word entails the generalized conviction that language could not express reality. This premise was taken to a dubious extreme by the creation of what was to be known as the “poética del silencio”. By the latter it was meant not only that

language points to silence, void and nothingness; it was also seen as a desirable end to be pursued. For many poets of the 1950s and 1960s, reality named by language becomes mere illusion. “Simulacro” is a crucial word to understand their attitude toward anything language is supposed to allude to. Let me illustrate this with a few examples. José Antonio Muñoz Rojas is a Spanish poet of the 1960s. In his “Paso de Dios” he writes:

Esto es largo y oscuro.

La palabra no sirve. La palabra se quiebra.

A veces te balbuce la lengua y queda todo

en silencio y tiniebla. (cited in Barón Palma 1996: 62)

Similarly, Francisco Brines poeticizes the impossibility of speech in “El porqué de las palabras”:

No tuve amor a las palabras;

[...]

Así uní a las palabras para quemar la noche,

hacer un falso día hermoso [...]

No tuve amor a las palabras,

¿Cómo tener amor a vagos signos [...]

Las palabras separan de las cosas

la luz que cae en ellas y la cáscara extinta [...]

Todos son gestos, muerdes, son residuos. (1984: 204-205; my emphasis)

The words in italics are the ones that seem to show most effectively this modern critique of language. Words have turned into empty husks. They are “false”, “vague signs”, mere “gestures”, that is, external and superficial signs, unable to access the reality of the objects or concepts they seek to name. For Brines, words are, indeed, dead.<sup>41</sup> This conception of the linguistic sign refers us to a Saussurean vision of language as an abstract code or system, as opposed to an idea of language as *utterance*, for which the sign is “alive” in the natural *pluriaccentuation* of the users of language, according to the Russian critic Mijail Bakhtin. Saussure’s arbitrariness principle lurks in this poem. That the linguistic sign is arbitrary—fundamental to Saussure’s linguistics—seems the premise that lie behind the following lines:

[Las palabras] no supieron separar la lágrima o la risa,

[...]

y valieron igual sonrisa, indiferencia.

Todos son gestos, muertes, son residuos. (1984: 205)

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<sup>41</sup> This view of language is proper to times of profound historical crisis, where the very same concept of civilization drowns, times which would require even more confidence and reliance on language. Note how Arthur Adamov’s words are similar to Brines’: “Worn, threadbare, filed down, words have become the carcass of words, phantom words” (cited in Steiner 1982: 52). However, Adamov was writing “during the political crisis of the 1938” and when war came, and what he asked himself was “whether the thought of being a writer was not an untimely joke, whether the writer would ever again, in European civilization, have a living, humane idiom with which to work” (Steiner 1982: 51), which is radically different from a pointless criticism of language. I draw this parallel because, although there were reasons to be critical of Spanish language’s contamination under the dictatorship, what it can nevertheless be objected to is the listlessness with which these questions have been avoided by criticism.

It is also worth reproducing Chilean poet Enrique Lihn's poem "La realidad no es verbal" in its entirety, for it contains all the elements encompassing the critique of language, demonstrating that the latter is a phenomenon beyond geographical barriers:

Hablar cansa: es indecible lo que es

Como se sabe: la realidad no es verbal

(cansa el cansancio de decir esto mismo)

De las palabras se retira el ser

como de la crecida inminente del río

los animales que, realmente, lo saben

a diferencia de los orilleros humanos

Somos las víctimas de una falsa ciencia

los practicantes de una superstición:

la palabra: este río a cuya orilla

como el famoso camarón nos dormimos

virtualmente ahogados en la nada torrencial

Incapaces, incluso, de saber qué corriente

y hacia dónde nos lleva

si todavía cabe pensar en un sujeto  
el verbo ir y como complemento  
un lugar que no hay –aunque se diga–  
en el adverbio donde y el hacia qué denota  
en el hablar de nada (siempre se habla de nada)  
-lo dice la gramática- la dirección del movimiento  
reducido, también, a un simulacro.  
Tú y yo hablamos del amor. (1997: 20)

What Lihn objects to in language is precisely its lack of objectivity. Language is a “false science”, he asserts, mere superstition. Language cannot claim to achieve any knowledge of “reality”, for linguistic elaborations are feigned appearances. Words are incapable of telling anything about the self (“de las palabras se retira el ser/ como de la crecida inminente del río/ los animales”). Lihn thus sees language as simulacrum and superstition.

There are countless examples of this modern critique of language. However, as the poet Luis García Montero points out: “detrás de las críticas a las imposibilidades de la representación o del lenguaje late el ilusionado deseo de otorgarle a la realidad una existencia trascendente” (1993: 163). He, furthermore, argues:

La destrucción de un simulacro no comporta la llegada a un paraíso anterior sino una extensión plana donde construir otro simulacro [...] Reconocer que vivimos en un

simulacro debe significar que tenemos el derecho a construir el simulacro que más nos convenga. (1993: 164)

What the critique of language implies is a crisis of realism, a breach in the previous confidence in the representational and mimetic power of language. According to Lanz, Gil de Biedma is the Spanish poet to have embodied this modern Spanish crisis of realism. On the topic of “reality” in relation to the poetry of Jaime Gil de Biedma, Lanz states:

La generación del cincuenta [...] nace con una clara conciencia realista [...] Pero, a lo largo de los años, los poetas de aquella generación se van dando cuenta de la imposibilidad de retratar la realidad tal cual es. (1990: 48)

Gil de Biedma, as an initiator of this modern Spanish crisis of the word, “resulta una figura de referencia fundamental para los jóvenes de la generación poética de 1968” (Lanz 1990: 52). Eventually, this loss of confidence in language ends up in the poet’s utter negation of reality: “De la educación en el ejercicio de la irrealidad se derivará, de modo directo, el rechazo explícito de la realidad propiamente dicha” (Lanz 1990: 49). By “educación en el ejercicio de la irrealidad” is meant, on the one hand, Gil de Biedma’s increasing realization of his “false consciousness”, owing to his experience of belonging to a bourgeois family and his reading of Marxist theory, to which he was introduced by the critic Castellet (Lanz 1990: 49). On the other hand, his education in the “unreal” has fundamentally to do with artistic imagination. (With respect to this, T. S. Eliot was to play an important role in Gil de Biedma’s poetic formation.)

The critique of language which led to the appraisal of the word as pointing to plain “unreality”, had also as a result, perhaps inevitably, a discrediting and even rejection of memory:

Por tanto, a la desvirtuación en la percepción de la realidad que supone, en el caso de Gil de Biedma, su educación burguesa en el ejercicio de la irrealidad, hay que añadir un nuevo elemento perturbador, antes del paso al poema: la memoria. El poeta es consciente de la deformación que supone la memoria [...] El pasado, así captado por la memoria, se percibe como un caos, fuente de duda y de irrealidad. (Lanz 1990: 49)

I have cited Lanz at length because what is said in the passage above is opposed to Grande’s views of memory, as I will show in the section in which I explain his “theory” of memory and forgetting.<sup>42</sup> It is not the mechanism of memory that distorts reality but, rather, the use of memory and the fact that it is sometimes governed by specific interests.<sup>43</sup>

Biedma’s view of memory could have also been influenced by that of T.S. Eliot, given that Eliot was a referential figure for the Spanish poet (Barón de Palma: 1996). According to Campbell, what T. S. Eliot thought of memory was that it is “unregenerative, incoherent, arbitrary and banal” (2000: 99). Eliot’s vision of memory

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<sup>42</sup> A clarification is needed here about my use of the word “theory”. I am aware of the problems that the term presents. See, for instance, Culler (1997). Hence, the inverted commas intend to suggest that I employ the word to claim that Grande develops his own original set of ideas about the subject which make up a relatively coherent system structuring his work.

<sup>43</sup> Miguel Dalmau’s (2004) hypothesis on Gil de Biedma’s relationship with language is that it was “convenient” for the poet to claim that everything in language is unreal, for he was fearful of showing in his poetry his homosexuality. By maintaining that poetry is fiction the poet would have been saved from being a victim of homophobia.

appears to have been derived from his vision of poetic language. In the following passage he explains how he sees the poetic function of language:

It is a function of poetry both to fix and make more conscious and precise emotions and feelings in which most people participate in their own experience and to draw within the orbit of feeling and sense what had existed only in thought. (Eliot 1993: 51)

Thus T. S. Eliot argued that the function of poetry was to make experience “more conscious and precise”. Yet as his poem’s stanza shows below, he realised that language fails to do the task, as memory which he conceived of as “incoherent” and “arbitrary”, would fail too:

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better words  
For the thing one no longer has to say. (2004: 182)

Eliot’s influence stretched throughout Spanish poetry of the twentieth century. His ascendancy over Luis Cernuda, for instance, is widely known.<sup>44</sup> Similar to the discussion above about Gil de Biedma, it is plausible to argue that Eliot influenced Cernuda in his ideas on memory too. According to Michael Ugarte, for Cernuda, “memory fills the vacuum of oblivion with imperfect copies in writing of what was once real” (1986: 333). It is said that Cernuda was as obsessed with precision and accuracy as was his “master”.

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<sup>44</sup> For further information on T.S. Eliot’s influence on Luis Cernuda and the Spanish lyrics of the time, see Barón Palma (1996).



When asked what he thought of Eliot, he answered: “es sin duda el más grande de todos [...] ¡Qué exactitud y qué precisión en el concepto!” (Barón Palma 1996: 40).

That memory is a mechanism incapable of precision and accuracy, incapable of delivering copies, became a generalized view in the poetry of Spanish poets of the postwar generations.<sup>45</sup> Gómez Toré, the author of a study on memory in the work of Brines, concludes that: “nuestro viaje por las imágenes de la memoria y de la escritura nos ha ofrecido un saldo más negativo que positivo” (2002: 283). According to the thesis of Pérez Parejo (2002), what Toré writes of Brines’ treatment of memory can be perfectly applied to poetry written in the postwar. Yet, arguably, this negative view of memory probably drew on assumptions that relate memory with a certain conception of realism. In fact, realism was a dominant current in Spanish poetry until the middle sixties, when a crisis in this conception of art occurred. Those who began to criticize realism called attention to the limits of language and the impossibility of memory to access the reality of the past. That is, they somehow yielded to the critique of language. As Barón Palma observes, this literary trend, which can be encompassed in the poetical phenomenon

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<sup>45</sup> See the work of Ramón Pérez (2002: 417-464). In it, Pérez analyses and shows well what he calls “la desconfianza en la actividad de la memoria”. He also supports the view that such “desconfianza” stems from certain literary ideas and mentions T.S. Eliot. Pérez draws on Derrida’s postulates, among other thinkers, in his search for philosophical support to the crisis of the word. Besides, Ilie (1980), when reflecting on “inner exile”, distinguishes between two attitudes toward memory; that of the poets who suffered territorial exile is characterised by reliability and trust, whilst inner exiled writers treated memory with suspicion and doubt. He also suggests that although the view of memory shared by inner exiled poets was generally negative, the treatment of memory by some of them was more akin to the poets of the territorial exile, as is precisely the case of Grande. What Ilie’s arguments imply then is that the ideas that the poets held on memory were to do with literary currents but, also, with historical circumstances.

called “culturalismo”, rested upon T.S. Eliot’s ideas on language to support the crisis of confidence in the word.<sup>46</sup>

However, what lies behind critiques of language and memory is a naïve vision of realism as “copy” rather than “construction”. Against this assumption it can be argued that memory is both a construct and a creative mechanism to produce psychological and cultural constructs. Furthermore, the crisis of the word underpins the dissociation of memory and language and even encourages the disavowal of memory. If we undermine language and memory, both the concept of the self and the notion of culture are significantly diminished as a result. However, without linguistic elaborations of memory it is difficult to see how fashioning the self would be possible or how any idea of culture could be configured.<sup>47</sup> Words are neither innocent nor neutral; they are embedded within memory, which is usually a history of struggle, of different voices seeking to impose their own nuances and accentuations (this is the social aspect of memory), according to Bakhtin and Voloshinov (1977: 44). Thus memory is largely configured linguistically and language contains the history of our culture.

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<sup>46</sup> Barón Palma (1996: 61-62) refers particularly to Jaime Gil de Biedma, who had an enormous influence on the poets that undertook a linguistic renovation of the Spanish lyrics, and, also, to the ones related to *Cántico*, a literary publication. *Cántico* welcomed the “revolution of language” carried out by T.S. Eliot, and defended a vision of poetry akin to the English poet. José Lanz (2000: 472-473) reminds us that the controversy that divided the “culturalistas” and “realistas” was above all a discussion on the ability of language to express. In relation to this, Barón Palma writes, “Gil de Biedma entra en la polémica con ayuda de las citas de Eliot” (1996: 76). The influence on Biedma of *The poetry of experience* by Langbaum is not to be underestimated either. See Carme Riera (1998). About the literary interests and influences of Biedma and what has been called “la escuela de Barcelona”, Riera states: “la lírica castellana les interesa menos, aunque salen diversos maestros [...] [Cernuda] que la inglesa (Eliot, Auden, Spencer...)” (1998: 8).

<sup>47</sup> According to Middleton and Wood, “it is now widely believed that memory is the foundation of personal identity, and that anything that damages it will threaten the self, a belief that has become of central importance to the hegemonic mode of poetry, the autobiographic lyric” (2000: 92-93).

That this one-sided negativism toward memory was often readily displayed without enough reflection on the subject is something that the case of T.S. Eliot proves. Whilst Eliot argues against memory, a contemporary of his, the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose interest and dedication to the study of memory overwhelmingly exceeds Eliot's, declared that "memories constitute the human soul and thereby transfigure the quotidian self" (Campbell 2000: 99). T.S. Eliot, in fact, heaped criticism on Bergson's ideas on memory. His "Rhapsody on a windy night" has been considered a veiled criticism of the Bergsonian ideal –pure memory. For instance, Gertrude Patterson writes: "Clearly, 'memory' in this poem only serves to make the present more sordid, more meaningless; this is the only 'illumination' which it can offer: it can urge the observer to no meaningful activity since its contents are useless to him" (1991: 475).

Bergson, however, placed more confidence in memory and carefully studied the phenomenon, and did not conceive of memory as defective. Contemporary research utterly denies that the mechanisms of "normal" memory, that is, standard memory mechanisms, are faulty.

It was Bergson who first established a link that contemporary research has come to demonstrate: the inextricable connection between memory and identity. He writes:

[...] our character, always present in all our decisions, is indeed the actual synthesis of all our past status. [...] our previous psychological life exists for us even more than the external world, of which we never perceive more than a very small part, whereas, on the contrary, we use the whole of our lived experience. (1988: 146)

Bergson also disputes the idea that memories are supposed to be always capricious by arguing that memory's function is adaptive, justifying the dialectics of memory and forgetting as well as the "intelligence" of memory:

[...] our former perceptions, [...] seem to us to have completely disappeared or to appear again only at the bidding of their caprice. But this semblance of complete destruction or of capricious revival is due merely to the fact that actual consciousness accepts at each moment the useful and rejects in the same breath the superfluous.

(1988: 146)

By the same token, the most authoritative Spanish expert on memory, Ruiz-Vargas, explains:

La memoria no es un guardián neutral del pasado. La memoria es un sistema dinámico que recoge, guarda, moldea, cambia, transforma y nos devuelve la realidad íntima y la realidad compartida tras ser destiladas en los interminables vericuetos del alambique de nuestra propia identidad. [...] La memoria no es sólo la esencia de nuestra identidad personal sino también el alma y el motor de la cultura. (1997: 11)

However, it would not be reasonable to explain away the issue of the generalized negative view of memory by virtue of its relation to the critique of language. The connection of the critique of language with depreciative connotations imposed on memory is remarkable, but it might not be the only explanation. There is yet another possible historical link. The state of amnesia to which the Franco regime condemned a great part of the country cannot be said to be the most appropriate environment for the flourishing and appreciation of memory. This politics of disremembering extended its

tentacles beyond the dictatorship and crystallized in the transitional “Pacto de olvido”. Thus the Spanish transition to democracy is increasingly being seen as epitomizing amnesia, except that in this case it is voluntary amnesia. Artists in general might have had their own reasons for the erasure or loathing of memory. Gil de Biedma, for instance, came to despise his own social background—he was born to a well-off, bourgeois family. His poem “De vita beata” shows my point well:

En un viejo país ineficiente,  
algo así como España entre dos guerras  
civiles, en un pueblo junto al mar,  
poseer una casa y poca hacienda  
y memoria ninguna. No leer,  
no sufrir, no escribir, no pagar cuentas,  
y vivir como un noble arruinado  
entre las ruinas de mi inteligencia. (Gil de Biedma 2005: 185)

Vilarós asks about this poem: “¿Qué ha pasado en España o qué le ha pasado al poeta que le ha determinado a cometer tal suicidio escritural, tal renuncia a la memoria?” (1998: 30). She answers this question within the question itself, rhetorically, by alluding to history: “reflejo a su vez de la renuncia y desencanto de toda una generación comprometida políticamente” (1998: 30). She adds: “Después de la experiencia de Franco no hay escapatoria, no hay una *vita beata* a la que podamos retirarnos a no ser que pase por la destrucción de la memoria” (1998: 30).

## 2.5 Beyond the “social/culturalist” poetry debate

Debicki has described the notion of “social poetry” in the following terms:

Un «poema social», en el sentido más amplio del término: un texto que con su lenguaje, su tono y sus recursos capta la experiencia compleja de la vida del escritor español.

(1989: 102)

For Debicki social poetry is not in contradiction with a careful use of language. He considers that social poets such as Ángel González make an intelligent use of rhetorical devices and literary techniques, so that they are capable of expressing complex experiences through a masterful employment of language.

On the whole, I agree with Debicki on this. However, criticism of the poetry written after the Civil War has often been reductively focused on this single debate and presented in dichotomic terms. It is difficult not to stumble upon the debate over social poetry when one reads literary criticism on Spanish post-Civil War poetry.<sup>48</sup> Critics tend to argue about whether a specific poet belongs to the category of “social poetry”, or that of “culturalist poetry”. In this section I bring forward the limitations of this analytical approach which call into question its validity as a predominant method of poetry criticism. Firstly, it is problematic to divide poets into different groups on the grounds of vague criteria that are not even shared by all critics. Secondly, poets regarded as “social”

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<sup>48</sup> For an exhaustive account of the social/culturalist debate, see Lanz (2000).

such as González seem to have lost their faith in words at some point or another. In “Preámbulo a un silencio” from *Tratado de urbanismo*, González states: “uno tiene conciencia/ de la inutilidad de todas las palabras” (1967: 44). Does this lack of confidence in words make González a culturalist? Adding to this confusion, Grande, who is considered to be another social poet, has nowadays been referred to as a culturalist.<sup>49</sup>

The social and culturalist discourses need not necessarily enter into conflict, as they often do, but can rather be seen as complementing each other. One-sided readings would always pose some problems. For instance, what “social poets”, along with their “social critics”, overlooked was precisely the constructive dimension of language, that is, its ability to create anew. They departed from a view of language that was rather poor. Social poets tended to regard language as a conduit through which extra-linguistic “realities” that lay “outside” language were to be conveyed. One of the premises assumed by social poetry is that there was a previously defined content which the poem served to communicate.<sup>50</sup> However, sometimes the form carries with it the message.

Culturalist poets, on their part, went as far as suggesting that language did not refer to anything other than to itself. The social poets were very clear about attaching purposes to poetry, whereas the non-social poets tended to dismiss the considerable impact of history on art. Then there were the questions as to the fictionality of language. From the perspective of literary renderings of trauma, such a question is relatively relevant, as

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<sup>49</sup> Rico (1998) defends the thesis that *Blanco spirituals* is a culturalist work.

<sup>50</sup> See Bousoño’s thesis (1956) on the communicability of poetry.

trauma tells the story of the unnameable.<sup>51</sup> Something which is unknown cannot be said to be fictional or true, although the experience of trauma is, evidently, “real”. So, a self-sufficient vision of language underestimates the role it plays in elaborating positions of the self.

Even when the topic of discussion is memory, Spanish critics find it difficult not to use the notion of social poetry as a critical category. For instance, Juan Miguel López Merino, in a recent article on the subject of “historical memory” in the poetry of the 1950s, writes about the poets who: “han mantenido un pie –o ambos– en lo «ético» y en «lo social», requisitos *sine qua non* para escribir desde una conciencia histórica que no haga caso omiso de la memoria y el dolor colectivos” (2008: 269).

Is an ethically expressed concern about social issues a condition *sine qua non* to be able to talk about memory in poetry? I claim it is not. Although memory often tends to be confused with the fictional writing of past events, and identified with an ethical stance, memory in literature goes beyond the imprecise notion of “historical memory”. Memory does not necessarily imply a moral position nor does it always “use” history (biographical or collective) as its theme. It is neither a theme nor has to be concerned *par force* with a writer’s political views, as many critics would have us believe. The temporal dimension of individuals manifests itself in ways that go beyond these two premises.

Lapuerta Amigo (1994), in her doctoral thesis on the poetry of Grande, makes this debatable association between memory and a kind of poetry that reflects history as a

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<sup>51</sup> From a Lacanian point of view, the unnameable is the Real, that to which we cannot have access. The Real is the transhistorical trauma inherent to the self. To question the psychoanalytical “Real” in terms of fictionality seems problematic.



theme. Apart from the concept of social poetry, she mentions other distinctions that have been made with regard to Spanish poetry of the second half of the twentieth century, namely the categories of “political poetry” and “civil poetry”. However, classifications into well-defined compartments, far from facilitating comprehension, tend to limit it. I claim that poetry should speak for itself, freed from categories that stifle its being alive and open to interpretation in its encounter with the reader. When criticism is reduced to a pre-determined type of reading, its task can be compared to the dissection of a dead corpse. My argument is that we should be using alternative analytical approaches in which patterns of criticism are not established *a priori*. The approach of social poetry has given its most and, arguably, is no longer fully productive.

The perspective of trauma represents an alternative way of looking at poetry, outside the frame of the social/culturalist debate, beyond stereotypes and common places. Reading trauma in a text has more to do with texture than with anything else. Trauma is concerned with the moulding of language into hitherto unformed “experiences”. It is an intricate phenomenon which manifests itself in language’s structure and in its limits to express itself fully. It partly precedes language, but it needs language to register the linguistic fracture. The focus of trauma draws on a view of art that emphasizes the structure of language, without being strictly formalist. For reading trauma also consists in acknowledging that the poet is constructing his own experiences in and through the poem, and in so doing he becomes a witness of an event he never quite owned.

The kind of knowledge that may be achieved through writing trauma is not strictly speaking “social” or “historical”. It differs from the rational cognitive way of thinking. The poet becomes both an active agent and a receiver of a special kind of knowledge. In

the best of cases, traumatic forms of narrative create anew the meaning or meanings of events whose significance is nevertheless only partly available. In the production of the poem, a process is set in motion whereby integration into consciousness of the experience-to-be takes place, opening up a possibility for healing. Ultimately, the creation of poetry itself alleviates the hitherto cognitively unresolved emotional conflict. However, there will always be the question whether or not re-living the trauma through writing paradoxically contributes to maintaining the wound.

The importance of reading trauma, thus, resides in the necessity of identifying the uniqueness of the survivor's experience. The truth of that experience lies at the heart of the meaning the poet struggles to communicate, a pursuit partly doomed to fail.

Trauma, ignored as an approach in the criticism of the Spanish poetry of the post-Civil War—with a few exceptions, among which the work of Christine Arkininstall stands out—rethinks the complex and subtle relations between history and the memory of the poet. History impacts on the poet in ways which are difficult to convey. What is significant about the traumatic experience is precisely the difficulty of its communicability, given that the poet has not fully come to terms with a belated story. This is not to say that poetry does not communicate, as those critical of social poetry were eager to assume. The singularity and seeming incommunicability of the poem does not prevent us from finding iterations, repetitive patterns that open the poem to understanding. According to Ulrich Baer:

Without opening itself [the poem] to understanding, the very claim for singularity would remain unnoticed. The “absolute poem”, as Celan emphasizes, which would be the poem that is truly singular, “das absolute Gedicht—nein, das gibt es gewiss nicht,

das kann es nicht geben! [the absolute poem—no, it certainly does not exist, it cannot exist”]. (2000: 11)

But, in order to signify, a work has first to be made. The significations or emotions associated with it only occur at the level of reading:

It is the reader who reads the sense, it is the reader who grants or recognizes in an object, place or event a certain possible readability; it is the reader who must attribute meaning to a system of signs, and then decipher it. (Manguel 1997: 7)

History is only knowable in poetry through particular assimilations of itself manifested in the poem. The internalization of time in the poem takes place in ways that are beyond will. The impact of History on the poet is difficult to predict. Absence of a clear reference does not exclude its influence either. As Ilie observes, “political oppression encourages nonreferential writing” (1985: 227).

Furthermore, such an impact must necessarily incorporate terms of conflict. If conflict is not present, the poem may become a container for propaganda. The dialectics of this tension between the individual and the social occurs at the level of individualized assimilation of history. Criticism then results from what is implicit in the conflicting relation of the poet with history, which is readable in a crisis manifested in language.

Grande’s poetry is not critical only by disposition, as stated by Manuel Rico (1998). Disposition somehow implies will and deliberation. Some social poetry might be deliberately critical, but the relationship between history and poetry cannot be reduced to mere will. There are aspects to such a relationship that do not include deliberate intentions.

It is in this sense that interpretations inscribed within the framework of “social poetry” are bound to set aside much of the significance of Grande’s poetry. In fact, critics of Grande make homogenising readings of his work, which they overtly regard as a “social work” (see my bibliography on Grande’s work). However, contrary to this view, the relation of Grande’s poetry to history can neither be envisaged as explicitly alluding to historical and cultural referents, nor as transmitting certain preconceived ideologies. Rico (1998) writes of Grande’s work as expressing a “cosmovisión de una época” through the poem. And yet this aspect of the relationship between poetry and history might be seen rather as a troubled and problematic interiorization of history. Such assimilation takes place in unpredictable forms, which are often far from apparent.

Therefore, as opposed to what the non-social poets tended to think, there is indeed an influence of history upon poetry, but this influence is to be seen as displaced in the poet in a manner a poet cannot foresee. Gamoneda refers to the relationship between “hechos interiorizados” and his poetry and calls attention to the fact that they are interiorized, not internal, which is a pertinent distinction:

Mi poesía, aun siendo prioritariamente autorreferente, adquiere su completo sentido cuando comporta un discurso inseparable de hechos interiorizados (he dicho interiorizados”, no “interiores”) que han proporcionado cuerpo y carácter a mi vida.<sup>52</sup>  
(cited in Casado 2004: 577)

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<sup>52</sup> Casado comments on Gamoneda’s vision of his poetry: “como se ve, la perífrasis no oculta el difícil contrapeso entre la autonomía de la escritura y su unión *inseparable* con los hechos de la vida” (2004: 577; his emphasis).

Cited by Jean Starobinski, for Pierre Jan Jouve historical time is compressed at the level of the personal experience: “contrazione del tempo storico nel tempo personale”.

Starobinski observes that genuine poetry assimilates history:

In caso di catastrofe, occorre che avvenga ciò che Pierre Jan Jouve chiama, a proposito di Rimbaud, 'contrazione del tempo storico nel tempo personale' [...] la responsabilità del poeta è piuttosto di conferire all'evento storico la qualità di evento interiore, di esprimerlo nella lingua lirica del sentimento piuttosto che in quella del giudizio e dell'esortazione [...] La vera poesia interiorizza la storia. (cited in Cortellessa 2006: 46)

This has been also observed by Middleton and Woods *a propos* of Eavan Boland, whom they quote as saying that “if a poet does not tell the truth about time, his or her work will not survive it” (cited in 2000: 188). But this “truth”, as Ulrich Baer observes, is one that has to do with interiorized time: “poetry exposes a truth not bound by history but by the lived experience of time” (2000: 23). Middleton and Woods also claim that “personal memories of loss are likely to be the best form in which tribute to the traumatic histories of the public past should be paid” (2000: 192). Yet the veracity of a poet’s interiorized time is a private truth that, nevertheless, can paradoxically presuppose more fidelity to history than mere factual accuracy. Here we engage with a conception of time as lived experience, just as Ricoeur understood it. He saw time as mediated through narrative. It means that time is not apprehensible through mere facts. Facts and events on their own do not account for the past. It is, on the contrary, their *mise en récit* that turns them into historical knowledge.

Even if trauma is lived individually, it may originate in collective experiences. In *Blanco spirituals*, as opposed to *Las piedras*, we find the poetic voice reflecting, enacting and working through collective trauma. And it is here that the concept of social poetry can prove more useful. For what the social poets were trying to achieve is a response to historical circumstances of the collective. The critique that may be levelled at them is their conviction that this response could be pre-determined, that is, prior to the moment the poem is being written. Conversely, those who opposed social poetry and centered their efforts on a self-referential writing failed to see that:

Graphocentrism accomplishes through its freedom from referentiality what dictatorships most desire: to deflect critical attention from matters historical, social, moral and personal. (Ilie 1985: 246)

## **2.6 The Spanish poetics of silence revisited**

The relationship between silence and poetry has been interpreted and approached by Grande's contemporaries in ways distinctive from Grande's view of silence. This thesis defends the idea that the concept of silence represents both a sociological phenomenon and a psychological trait specific to the particular time of the history of Spain, which has been assimilated into poetry in dissimilar ways. Yet the topic of poetic silence has not been fully explored from this particular perspective and within the context of that historical time. In order to address it, one needs to reconsider in the first place the fundamental phenomenon that has cast a shadow over other ways of understanding the

relationship between poetry and silence—the so-called “poética del silencio” (hereafter called the poetics of silence). José Ángel Valente was, in the Spanish case and for the second half of the twentieth century, the poet to whom the beginning and the development of a discourse upon the relation of literature and muteness has been mostly attributed.

Although silence in the work of Valente can be studied as a literary phenomenon or even considered as an aspect of his craft, it can also be put into perspective, compared with how silence manifests itself in the work of other poets, and, above all, valued in the context of what silence represents for the literature produced in the light of concrete historical circumstances. Ultimately, the question of silence as well as its relation to poetry is subject to criticism and it can be perfectly qualified and nuanced, especially in relation to a period whose “desmemoria” is being currently questioned in many academic works.<sup>53</sup> I shall analyze now what Valente’s poetics of silence entails from the perspective of the imposed political and sociological silence upon which Ruiz-Vargas commented before.

Relevant to the question of silence is its close association with memory’s underestimation. Where language is minimal or nonexistent, memory is also inhibited. In the poem “Criptomemorias” from the collection *Interior con figuras*, José Ángel Valente writes:

Debiéramos tal vez [...]

borrar de nuestros rostros en el álbum materno

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<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, Álvarez Fernández (2007).

toda noticia de nosotros mismos.[...]

O por toda memoria, [...]

Nada.

De ser posible, nada. (1985: 57)

I would like to remark that in Valente's work the discrediting of memory, when not an altogether relinquishing of it, frequently operates as veiled criticism of an imposed official memory, for memory is connected with different ideological layers that function as masks. What Valente seems to be putting forward is also a desperate response to the absurd lack of freedom under Francoism. In other words, the poet, being deprived of his personal use of memory, a personal view on things, is forced to adopt a unifying discourse. In the face of it, to opt for silence even appears as the reasonable choice, as Juan Ramón Jiménez put it: "el poeta, en puridad, no debiera escribir, puesto que su mundo, lo inefable, le condena al silencio" (cited in Mas 1986: 27).

In *Poemas a Lázaro*, allegedly Valente's most socially minded work, we find lines expressing the poetic voice's decisiveness to renounce its own memory for the benefit of collective remembering, which is in accordance with the tenets of social poetry:

Mi historia ha de ser olvidada

mezclada en la suma total

que la hará verdadera. (1981: 46)

Leaving aside the social orientation of this work, for Valente silence represents a constant search. But his was a "programa estético" (Bonald 2001: 86), in which his quest for supposedly "genuine essences" somehow left out the links of silence and history. This



is a choice the poet was entitled to make. But silence is also embedded in history. There are more sides to the relationship between poetry and silence than the one represented by the work of Valente.<sup>54</sup> In the light of what silence represented sociologically in Spain, it can be argued that it has enjoyed a reputation that it did not deserve. It is subject to criticism on several fronts. The poetics of silence became a sort of conceptualization of poetry with a first clear consequence that contradicts its initial intentions: to set poetry free of ideological burdens. *Poesía del silencio*'s implicit criticism of the so-called "poesía social" is problematized by the fact the poetics of silence turned into a sort of poetry-making model through its deliberate association of creation with certain pre-determined criteria. Hence the poetic creation of silence incurred in what it purportedly attempted to avoid, the use of tenets guiding the artistic process.

However, what remains of the influence of "poética del silencio" seems to be an idea of poetic creation as purification, or poetry understood from a minimalist approach. María José Flores understands Valente's "poética del silencio" as a rhetorical technique leading to the elimination of "unnecessary" elements in the poem, as in the "poesía pura" of Juan Ramón Jiménez.<sup>55</sup> José Manuel Caballero Bonald agrees with Flores, but he is more critical of the poetics of silence:

Lo de la "poética del silencio" me suena ya un poco a lo de la "pintura invisible" de

Rothko, esa entelequia consistente en la eliminación de todos los obstáculos expresivos

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<sup>54</sup> A different approach is that of Túa Blesa (1998), which is concerned with the textualization of silence in the work of poets such as José-Miguel Ullán. Blesa makes it clear that his exploration of silence shies away from a "mystical" perspective (an indirect reference to Valente's "poética del silencio").

<sup>55</sup> In conversation with the poet and Professor of Spanish Literature at *Università dell'Aquila*, Italy.

que impidan llegar a la “esencia de lo esencial”. De ahí a la impotencia creadora no hay más distancia que un cuadro vacío o un poema en blanco. Qué patológica peligrosidad la del pensamiento artístico que supera con mucho a su canalización o sólo consiste en una inoperante concordancia entre el yo del escritor y el sujeto de su obra. (2001: 86)

In the passage above Caballero Bonald establishes clearly two things. First, that the poetics of silence implies the erasure of expressive remora hindering expression of the essential. This, as Flores also observes, is a characteristic of the “poesía pura” of Juan Ramón Jiménez. Second, he criticizes the excessive thinking that precedes the creation of the poem. Such a trait can be found in realist poetry as much as in non-mimetic poetry, as the poetics of silence, according to him, demonstrates.

Hence Valente’s belief that the absolute principle of all creation is the creation of nothingness can be said to be problematic: “La creación de la nada es el principio absoluto de toda creación” (2004: 208). A poet may deliberately seek out the creation of silence by reenacting its void through techniques such as fragmentation or minimalism or obscure symbolism. But these techniques, by the very fact of their employment, are already pointing to the existence of a previous aim or purpose (the creation of nothingness is in itself a purpose and it is not empty of ideological value, since it might be accused of being complicit with the political imposition of silence).<sup>56</sup> Conversely, creation of silence may be a way of avoiding complicity. This happens, for instance, in film criticism. It is

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<sup>56</sup> For Engelson Marson, Valente deliberately creates this confusion by using “un lenguaje duro e hiriente, lleno de adjetivaciones violentas y símbolos de difícil captación, para que el lector reaccione, piense y, últimamente, alcance a conocer las realidades esenciales de una existencia común” (1992: 119). Yet it is difficult to see how a language difficult to grasp could result in a better understanding of our shared existence and not lead to a deeper cognitive darkness.

frequent to comment on cinematic techniques that call attention to themselves to produce an effect, namely, to subvert an established order, or to reverse a stereotype or a common place, to dismantle, perhaps, our unquestioned ways of seeing. Another way of seeing silence is through the lenses of conflict. For instance, Jean Franco has noted Vallejo's constant calling attention to language through the use of various techniques, yet, as the critic recognizes in her prologue "There was [...] a real conflict of values between Vallejo as a poet and the society in which he lived, a conflict sublimated into literature" (1976: 15). It is intelligible that this conflict was enacted and lived out in Vallejo's poetry, yet in this case we have the use of a technique with an aim that goes beyond the use of silence for the sake of creating more silence.

Other poets talk about silence and poetry in a more nuanced way. Jean-Baptiste Para sees the creation of poetry as coming from a suffering silence ("dolente mutismo"). And yet the mission of poetry would consist in finding a way out of silence, as he explains:

Colui che avverte la propria irrilevanza è preparato meglio di ogni altro a tentare l'impresa del poema. Convertirà il proprio dolente mutismo in un silenzio in cui saprà incarnarsi la parola. Una parola dove dietro ogni vocabolo è l'intero linguaggio che tenta una sortita. Perché il poema è una venuta al mondo. [...] Ma se il poema è nascita al mondo, esso è anche nascita del mondo. (2007: 35)

For Para, poetry attempts to deal with the unknown, since poetry is "un modo di intentare una scommessa con l'ignoto" (2007: 35). However, one thing is to admit to the unknown, to acknowledge its inevitable presence in the form of silence, which involves pain as Para observed above, and an altogether different matter is to consider art as a

means for perpetuating silence. In other words, whilst for Para silence is already there, without us intervening, Valente seems to be indulging in it. For Para, silence is a constant struggle. Valente sees it with complacency: “Lo importante es mirar y dejar en libertad la mirada. Yo vería hoy la poesía como un desconocimiento” (cited in García 2001: 97). “Inconocimiento” may be the thrust behind the making of poetry, but the latter does not necessarily have as an end the further creation of “inconocimiento”, that is, more than the one already lurking in it *par force*. This is how Antonio Domínguez Rey sees Valente’s search for silence:

Valente nos abre el resquicio de lo oculto indeterminado [...] De hecho toda poesía válida tiende a la estructuración simbólica de sus ejes dinámicos. Se aboca a lo Otro inmanente, la pantalla proyectiva de las conformaciones no lógicas manipuladas por un grado de conciencia vigilante. El contenido va en busca de su fuente. (1992: 141)

The unconscious is indeed situated in the realm of the transhistorical. But if we are to believe the author of the passage above about what Valente’s poetry implies, the argument taken *a priori* contains its own invalidation. A vigilant conscience would, opening up the unconscious’s process, either exist on an unconscious level or not exist at all. Furthermore, this quotation passes judgment on what poetry should be (“toda poesía válida”), conflating the contingent with the necessary and in so doing it forecloses a complex phenomenon, poetry, that cannot be explained away so easily.

Grande qualifies this aim of creation as supreme illiteracy and as a rapid dismissal of the *raison d’être* of language. He argues:

Ahora, los más apresurados identifican esa experiencia de supremo analfabetismo, de clamorosa e impúdica ignorancia, con la conciencia de la muerte y con un nuevo orden donde reina la nada. Pero los más humildes, muy trabajosamente, muy lentamente, corazón, muy despacio, inician, con cuidado conmovedor, la reconquista del lenguaje. (1996: 188)

Silence can be said to be partially constitutive of human nature and the reason for a constant search for ways to replace it. However, Grande does not employ rhetorical devices to produce silence deliberately. It is palpable throughout his work by the poetic voice's painful self-questioning about the origin of silence. The painstaking effort he puts into deciphering the reason behind the inaccessibility of silence is remarkable, as is his overwhelmingly frequent inability to make light out of silencing experiences. But this latter kind of silence is a traumatic one, very different from the sort of silence which Valente attempted to conquer. Valente advocated that poetry be carried to "punto cero", his poetry not only had "punto cero" as a "starting point"; his poetry was, moreover, a "quest for punto cero" (García 2001: 101).<sup>57</sup> Thus silence appears to be for Valente a deliberate aim, a thoroughly thought-out poetic project.

However, we need to ask about different understandings of the relation between poetry and silence. And such a question touches the core of what literature is. Literature not only deals with structural absence, which is central to it, but, more precisely, it

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<sup>57</sup> Irrespective of whether we understand the quest for "punto cero" as that utopian place of language in which language disappears or as "la infinita disponibilidad del lenguaje" (Mas 1992: 309), we need to bear in mind when talking about language what Emmanuel Levinas warns about the "absurdity" and "isolation" that lies in "countless significations" (2003: 24).

accounts for the distinct ways in which the silence that is inherent in historical losses might be confronted. To clarify this point let me put forward a statement by Antonio Gamoneda on the nature of poetry:

La poesía no es literatura [...] La literatura está en la ficción, que puede ser maravillosa, pero la poesía es una realidad en sí misma. La poesía no es literatura. Contiene nuestros goces y nuestros sufrimientos, y esa relación con la existencia le da un carácter que va más allá de los géneros. Por eso también hay poetas literatos y novelistas poetas. (2007: 52)

Gamoneda's statement raises questions about the way we look at and talk about poetry. Valente's self-awareness of his poetic process might be more connected with the task of criticism than with creation itself. It is not to be denied that creation can be connected to criticism, but creation does not take criticism as a pre-requisite. Sometimes, poetic creativity can be compromised and hindered by the pre-existence of an "end", regardless of whether this end might be "literary" in contraposition to "political" or "social". According to Deleuze, genuine literature is, more often than not, free from these pre-fixed conditioning elements that demonstrate too much self-awareness of the act of writing:

To those who ask what literature is, Virginia Woolf responds: To whom are you speaking of writing? The writer does not speak about it, but is concerned with something else. If we consider these criteria, we can see that, among all those who make books with a literary intent, even among the mad, there are very few who can call themselves writers. (1998: 6)

Now, Steiner acutely presents us with a vision of silence that is altogether different from the one implicit in the Spanish poetics of silence. Steiner relates silence to the crisis of the word, but at the same time refers to the historical conditions that made it possible for silence to emerge:

An estrangement from language was, presumably, a part of a more general abandonment of confidence in the stabilities and expressive authority of central European civilization. (1982: 51)

He links the crisis of the word to the appearance of the inhuman as represented by the Nazi genocide: “But this sense of death in language, of the failure of the word in the face of the inhuman, is by no means limited to German” (1957: 51). Indeed, Grande’s poetry, as that of many other poets of his time, attests to this. In this respect it is surprising that Valente calls attention to Celan’s work to support his thesis on silence. In Valente’s interpretation of Paul Celan’s poetry, which for Valente was the embodiment of silence (“Paul Celan trabajó muy hondamente su palabra” [2004: 210]) he overlooks Celan’s struggle with the inhuman. His experiences are difficult to articulate for reasons other than an intentional search for silence. Thus the aspect of Celan’s work that Valente misses is the German poet’s use of language to deal with his experience of the Holocaust. Celan’s writing cannot be said to be deliberately deconstructive or postmodern in that he did not deliberately force language to draw attention to its own limitations and silences. Silence in his work is not a rhetorical technique. As Steiner observes: “The poetry of Celan is to be included with the very greatest in Western literature ... [because it] altered the scope of poetry” (cited in Baer 2000: 15). I agree with Baer in his opposition to those

who assert Celan was a postmodern. Convoluted writing in Celan is not a rhetorical technique. On the contrary, what he finds difficult to communicate is his unresolved experience of the Holocaust. Trauma, in fact, unites poets coming from very different times and backgrounds, as Baer demonstrates:

We have seen how Baudelaire is confronted with the task of accounting for experiences that lack both empirical or conceptual horizons. Celan has to respond to the loss of a horizon for experience that goes beyond anything Baudelaire had imagined. This loss of a horizon for experience, or of a way of making sense of experience, is a loss that occurred in language itself. Celan has to testify to this loss within language by relying on language to express it. (2000:169; my emphasis)

It is precisely the unnameability of Celan's experience, the silence haunting his poetry, that he so desperately attempts to overcome through language. He relied on language as the means for releasing himself from the prison that silence represents for him (impossibility of making sense of his experience):

Because a meaningful account of this interruptor or breakdown of a horizon for experience within language depends on language, Celan must at once note the interruption by relying on nonbroken language and, at the same time, suggest this breakdown in his verse. He must turn language, as it were, against itself. [...] Celan's efforts of turning language against itself, however, results not in a celebration of negativity but opens onto a poetic experience comparable to that in Baudelaire's verse. (2000: 172; my emphasis)



The latter differs greatly from what a critic describes as “la escritura como negatividad” referring to Valente’s “punto cero” (Mas 1992: 310). On this dual aspect of art Geoffrey Hartman comments by making a distinction between affirmative art and the kind of art which embarks exclusively on a “labour of the negative”—which implies, according to Geoffrey Hartman, a “cerebral, demystifying, deconstructive” task (1997: 43). This distinction is fundamental, for it indicates that there are things only expressible in art. The philosopher Badiou states: “The sole task of an exclusively affirmative art is the effort to render visible all that which, from the perspective of the establishment, is invisible or nonexistent” (cited in Hallward 2003: 195). And where he writes “establishment” one can also think of historical forces or psychic forces rooted in historical events.

Valente, in contradistinction to this, over-emphasizes the impossibility of the word (“palabra [...] que sólo en su imposibilidad encuentra su posible”), (1991: 253). As Jonathan Mayhew states (2006: 75), “Valente’s view of the phenomenon of ‘poetry’ became single-minded and intransigent”. It is difficult not to see that behind Valente’s intransigence there was an idea of poetry as that which can be defined according to certain *immanent* criteria. One of these immanent criteria is the difficulty of modern poetry, a sort of hermetism which can be considered the other side to silence: “Valente conceives the difficulty of modern poetry as essential rather than accidental” (Mayhew 2006: 81). However, as Baer demonstrates, modern poetry confronts “experiences that lack both empirical or conceptual horizons” (2000: 169), which may account for such a difficulty. That is, its obscurity, rather than being intrinsic, responds to historical circumstances.

Valente believed that “la creación de la nada es el principio absoluto de toda creación” (2004: 208). In this affirmation he privileges the absolute over the accidental. What is worse, he excludes the possibility that alternative principles might guide the creative process. According to Barrow:

Creation out of Nothing is one of the by-products of the early Christian Church’s disputes with the ideas of Greek philosophy. [...] Even if you wish to conceive of a moment before which the material world did not exist, the eternal forms still exist. Complete Nothingness is inconceivable. [...] We can perhaps imagine that no material universe exists, maybe even that no laws of Nature exist, but nothing *at all* is unimaginable for us because it would mean no facts could exist – not even a fact like the statement that nothing exists, in fact”. (2001: 297).

Barrow goes to the core of the question that needs stressing with regard to Valente’s poetics of silence. His idea that absolute Nothingness is behind creation is contradicted by the very same uttering of such a statement. Rather than nothingness, it is his idea that nothingness guides creation that drives his writing. Such an idea has been conceived and imagined and it is already “something” other than nothingness. In Poucel’s words:

Representing nothingness linguistically is therefore difficult, for it addresses an epistemological problem. Although nothingness may exist—and mourning in love may indeed be a phenomenological experience that contextualizes nothingness—its expression in the matter of language, because rendered complete in that medium, remains unrepresentable. [...] While nothingness is real, it is strictly unknowable, undefinable, and consequently not able to be represented. (2006: 189)

Therefore, nothingness could not have possibly directed Valente's writing; rather, his writing was directed by his ideas on nothingness, which were also, to a great extent, borrowed. He, who had so strongly attacked the use of themes in poetry, made nothingness and silence into mere themes. Mayhew states "Valente's poetry is suffused with identifiable Heideggerian *themes*" (2006: 79).

Another troubling aspect of Valente's poetics of silence is the question of poetry and communication. Valente advocated the concept of "comunicabilidad", instead of what he sees as "vulgar communication", defining the earlier as the perfecting of the "acto jeroglífico de la escritura" (2004: 210). This "acto jeroglífico" is, to put it differently, the incommunicability of the poem, as Mayhew states: "'communicability' is a paradoxical concept, in that it entails the negation of 'communication' itself" (2006: 80).

Let us remember here that "poesía es comunicación" is the shibboleth of realist poetry of the time and that Valente's poetics of silence is supposedly a reaction against it. The origin of the controversy goes back to Bousoño's theory of poetry, which argues that communication is a function of the poetic.<sup>58</sup> Barral answered Bousoño with his article "Poesía no es comunicación", published in *Laye* in 1953, and answered by Bousoño in 1956. However, the presence of silence in poetry does not foreclose communication, as the cases of Celan and Grande himself show. They aimed at emerging from darkness through language. They struggle for the word not to be sunken, but for it to emerge to the surface from the invisible profundities whence unbearable pain comes.

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<sup>58</sup> Bousoño defines poetry as follows: "la transmisión puramente verbal de una compleja realidad anímica previamente conocida por el espíritu como formando un todo, una síntesis a la que se añade secundariamente una cierta dosis de placer" (cited in Bonet 1988: 150). Note how Bousoño believes in the pre-existence of "contents" to which the poet will give form, as the social poets believed too.

Valente was correct when thinking that through the work of art we have access to the part of reality that remains concealed, invisible: “sólo entendida como invención o hallazgo de la realidad encubierta cobra la actividad poética su verdadero sentido e impone la razón profunda de su necesidad” (cited in Mas 1986: 26). That said, it is difficult to see how this can be reconciled with the fact of having a poetic “formula”: “pero la palabra poética sólo se cumple o se sustancia en ese borde extremo del silencio último que ella integra y en el que ella se disuelve” (1991:240). Valente does not believe in the experience of the poet, in the existence of any referent. He thinks the self is banished, disappears in the poem:

[...] la disolución de la forma, donde el lenguaje queda en suspenso [...] detenido o deslumbrado por lo que en él se manifiesta, y donde, junto con el lenguaje, entran en su disolución [...] las nociones de espacio y de tiempo o la noción del sí mismo o del yo. Tal es la experiencia extrema del lenguaje en la que el poeta y el místico concurren. (1991: 241)

Valente sees the relationship between experience and language as non-existent:

Por eso el tiro del crítico yerra cuando en vez de dirigirse al poema se dirige a la supuesta experiencia que lo ha motivado, buscando en ésta la explicación de aquella, porque tal experiencia, en cuanto susceptible de ser conocida, no existe más que en el poema y no fuera de él. (1986: 26-27)

In contraposition, note what Derrida writes on the act of creation in Celan. The philosopher claims that Celan leaves a mark on the German language and this mark can be tracked down to him, it is an act he perpetrates, it belongs to him:

It seems to me he touches the German language both by respecting the idiomatic spirit of that language and in the sense that he displaces it, in the sense that he leaves upon it a sort of Scar, a mark, a wound. (2005: 99-100)

Derrida, furthermore, states:

It is difficult not to think of [Celan's lines "No one/bear witness for the/ witness"] as also referring, according to an essential *reference*, to dates and events, to the existence or experience of Celan. These "things" that are not only "words": the poet is *the only one who can bear witness to them*. (67)

Perhaps one of the critics whose opinions are among the clearest about Celan's lack of premeditated intentions to create silence is Jean Bollack. Bollack even goes as far as attributing to Celan's poetry a social role, which is at the antipodes of Valente's opinion on Celan: "Celan était convaincu jusqu'à la fin que son art avait une mission sociale" (2001: 279):

Je ne pense pas qu'il se trouve des poétiques programmatiques, au sens où on l'entend, dans les poèmes de Celan. Ce sont des "experiences", plutôt, personnelles et donc linguistiques. (2001: 282)

In fact, in a letter to Enrich Einhor, Celan claims that nothing but his own experience is behind his poetry and that his intention is to be "realist" in his own way: "Non ho mai scritto una riga che non abbia avuto che fare con la mia esistenza – io sono, come vedi, realista a mio modo" (2001: 451). Bollack states that in Celan's poetry there is no such a thing as "l'abolition du réel dans un ordre absolu" (2001: 282). Celan knows

what Barrow observed earlier with regard to nothingness: “Das absolute Gedicht—nein das gibt es gewiss nicht, das kann es nicht geben” (the absolute poem does not exist, it cannot exist) (cited in Baer 2000: 11). Therefore, he does not believe in total singularity, and if we think that “singularity is silence” (Derrida, 2005: 8), he thus cannot believe in that kind of silence. Words are autonomous but not detached from experience: “les mots [...] ne se sont pas détachés, dans leur autonomie, de l’événement et de l’histoire” (Bollack 2001: 283). The latter is in opposition to Valente’s aforementioned effort to “problematize communication even further by cultivating a deliberately difficult mode of writing” (Mayhew 2006: 81).

Valente sees creation (language) as an act of dissolution of the self, but a premeditated one. However, sometimes historical circumstances (exile, trauma) force the self into its own disintegration, as in the case of Celan, without the intervention of his or her will. This is also the case with Grande, who summons up words to avoid dissolution.<sup>59</sup> Valente’s failure to see certain aspects of this kind of silence can be levelled as a critique of his poetic thinking (more than of his poetry). The first criticism that can be directed at Valente’s thought on the topic is theoretical: his poetics of silence is undermined by contradictions and, more importantly, he misconstrued to a great extent what silence meant for a poet he admired and sought to follow.<sup>60</sup>

The second criticism that can be levelled is ethical. For he did not take into consideration in his reflections on silence the question of ethics and power relations. Part

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<sup>59</sup> In “Otra figura del insomnio” Grande’s poetic voice says of words: “las palabras de amor o gratitud que dije o escuché como barricadas solemnes contra el ejército de la disolución” (284).

<sup>60</sup> An example of a contradiction is Valente’s following statement, which, also, shows how he considered ineffability to be a topos: “¿No se convertirá el tópico de la inefabilidad [...] en tópico de la eficacia radical del decir?” (cited in Mas 1986: 27).

of that relationship is embedded in the political repression of the speechless *Other*. The question to be posed is how Valente, who wrote during the long night of silence of the dictatorial state, who we know was completely critical of the regime, could have defended silence to such a great extent. Spanish fascism meant the negation of the Other, its deliberate silencing, within the context of a “diseased state”, to use Deleuze’s words. This silence of the Other interrupted the process of *becoming* of individual lives.<sup>61</sup> In the face of this, literature, according to Deleuze, plays an important role:

There is always the risk that a diseased state will interrupt the process of becoming [...] the constant risk that a delirium of domination will be mixed with a bastard delirium, pushing literature toward a larval fascism, the disease against which it fights [...] The ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, the possibility of life. To write for this people who are missing... (“for” means less “in the place of” than “for the benefit of”). (1998: 4)

This delirium of domination silences the voice of the Other. To write for a people who are missing, not in the place of but for the benefit of, has much to do with testimonial literature. In his study of some testimonial literature produced during Francoism, Álvarez Fernández asserts:

Los testimonios aquí tratados, además de recuperar no sólo toda una herencia política que tuvo por bandera la lucha contra el fascismo y la consecución de una sociedad más justa y libre, denuncian y se rebelan contra esa política onerosa del silencio/consenso/impunidad. (2007: 25)

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<sup>61</sup> See section on the fashioning of the self for a definition of the concept of “becoming”.

Teresa Vilarós (1998) refers to the erasure of memory perpetrated during the Spanish transition to democracy by the “Pacto de olvido” (Pact of Forgetting), also called the “Pacto de silencio”. This erasure of memory is a continuation of the same “assassination” of memory that occurred under Francoism. It is curious, to say the least, that she uses Valente’s expression of “punto Cero” to put across the cancellation of memory:

En la cartografía del imaginario colectivo se inscribe el período transicional como un “Punto Cero” que, aunque se presenta en lo político como reforma, en el inconsciente colectivo y en la práctica social se escribe sobre todo como ruptura. (1998: 15).

The word “ruptura” means here severance with the memory of the Civil War and Franco’s repression, what Vilarós describes as a “ruptura psíquica con la historia reciente” and “eliminación súbita de toda referencia al pasado inmediato franquista” (1998: 16).

A silenced memory is a traumatized memory over which he who speaks exerts control. Edward Said already saw this problem with regard to the relation between the West and the Orient. Said asserts that the West uses language, writes, which means establishes realities, creates truths (even if they are lies) about an Orient that remains “in the dimensionless silence”:

I call such a relation between Western writing (and its consequences) and Oriental silence the result of and the sign of the West’s great cultural strength, its will to power over the Orient. (1978: 94)



Speaking for an Other who is deprived of its own voice means that the Other is powerlessly muted in the face of a dominating discourse which, because it exists unchallenged by any other discourse, is automatically suffused with “meaning, intelligibility, and reality” (Said 1978: 95).

Although Valente was preoccupied with the creation of a mode of writing that would transcend a trite and public use of it, he approached it from an alienated perspective. His concern with the public or the repressive state’s misuses and abuses of language was not attached to what Said observed above, that is, to the problem of the absence of the Other. On the contrary, his conceptualization of poetry encouraged silence, not as a reaction to the historical circumstances; rather, it was somehow detached from those circumstances to constitute another different endeavour. Valente’s concern remains somewhat abstract and strictly limited to a literary trend: “the Utopian quest for an authentic language [...] is part of this modern mode of poetic writing” (García 2001: 101). However, this modern mode of poetic writing does not necessarily have to be limited to the literary. Other poets chose to reflect on their historical backdrops too. Note how Steiner describes the difficulties that Celan and other exiled German writers found in having to use the German language and how he carefully avoids presenting the matter in strictly literary terms by alluding to History and linking language and soul:

Languages have great reserves of life. They can absorb masses of hysteria, illiteracy and cheapness. [...] But there comes a breaking point. Use a language to conceive, organize, and justify Belsen; use it to make out specifications for gas ovens; use it to dehumanize man during twelve years of calculated bestiality. Something will happen to it. Make of words what Hitler and Goebbels and the hundred thousand

Untersturmführer made: conveyors of terror and falsehood. Something will happen to the words. Something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language. [...] The cancer will begin, and the deep-set destruction. The language will no longer grow and freshen. It will no longer perform, quite as well as it used to, its two principal functions: the conveyance of humane order which we call law, and the communication of the quick of the human spirit we call grace. In an anguished note in his diary for 1940, Klaus Mann observed that he could no longer read new German books: "Can it be that Hitler has polluted the language of Nietzsche and Hölderlin?" It can. But what happened to those who are the guardians of a language, the keepers of its conscience? What happened to the German writers? [...] the major writers went into exile. This exodus is of first importance if we are to understand what has happened to the German language and to the soul of which it is the voice. Some of these writers fled for their lives [...] But many could have stayed [...] But [Thomas] Mann would not stay. And the reason was that he knew exactly what was being done to the German language and that he felt that only in exile might that language be kept from final ruin. (1967: 101-102)

This quotation shows well the issues involved in the relationship between history, language and silence. Silence is here, in a very catastrophic way, attached to a set of events which cannot escape their linguistic dimension. The reflection on silence, thus, assumes for the German writers a humane side, it constitutes a desperately impossible stance in the face of barbarity and it becomes an ethical imperative, a question of responsibility, all of which can hardly have been justified or explained on grounds of mere rhetoric. Thomas Mann explains it thus:

The mystery of language is a great one; the responsibility for a language and for its purity is of a symbolic and spiritual kind; this responsibility does not have merely an aesthetic sense. The responsibility for language is human responsibility [...] Should a German writer, made responsible through his habitual use of language, remain silent, quite silent, in the face of all the irreparable evil which has been committed daily, and is being committed in my country, against body, soul and spirit, against justice and truth, against men and man? (cited in Steiner 1982: 102)

Silence engages with “responsibility” and the latter “does not have merely an aesthetic sense”. And yet poets such as Celan found a way in which aesthetics and responsibility could not be disentangled. It might be said that similar circumstances did not bring about a similar level of aesthetic reflection or aesthetic production in Spanish letters. This discourse of the role of aesthetics in the face of the inhuman had already taken place among the Spanish poets who were involved or chose not to be during the Spanish Civil War. And it continued during the post-War. Many of the writers who left Spain could have stayed and, yet, they did not. In exile many of those Republican writers felt that their language was safe from contamination. Ilie, as seen before, ultimately agrees with Steiner that in exile language is better preserved. Such a preoccupation with regard to words that had been necessarily contaminated by an oppressive and brutal regime was shared by the politically committed poets of the fifties. However, instead of a proper reflection upon aesthetics and responsibility in the vein of that pointed to by Steiner above, it resulted in the production of silence. According to Vilarós:

En la España “unificada” de la dictadura también los intelectuales de las viejas generaciones necesitaban a los entonces más jóvenes, a los de la generación de los años

cincuenta, para que éstos cantaran, en una lengua nueva y no contaminada, los hechos impuros [...] de un Caudillo. Así lo hicieron éstos, y vimos como consecuencia el florecimiento de toda la literatura social española de posguerra. El canto y la palabra de esta generación debió ser, desde la esperanza de los que perdieron la guerra, el pararrayos absorbente del estallido franquista, el sujeto catártico que haría posible la restauración de un estado anterior de bonanza. (1998: 31)

Vilarós further on observes that some poets, among them Gil de Biedma and Gabriel Ferrater, did not believe in this cathartic process that the poets of the fifties thought language could produce: “tuvo que morir Franco para que la mayoría de los intelectuales se dieran cuenta de ello, la 'impureza franquista', el legado franquista, iba tornándose parte de ellos mismos, día a día, semana a semana y año tras año”; hence these poets relinquished the task of creating “la utópica *lengua* del futuro, fresca y sin impurezas” (1998: 32). According to Vilarós, the unsatisfactory mood that the latter brings about leads to a type of poetry where:

Palabra y sentido, gesto y sentido, signo y sentido se encuentran en una gélida región del silencio, porque se ha reconocido ya que no hay nada que entender, nada que esperar, nada que pueda asegurar recompensa una vez diferida la satisfacción del deseo. (1998: 32)

This nothingness and silence, which according to Vilarós culminates in the transition (“agujero negro” 1998: 41) and its cultural and artistic consequences, are very unproductive: “no han quedado tras ella, desde luego, 'grandes obras', precisely because those years are “la historia de un vacío [...] la historia de 'nada’” (1998: 34). It is the

practice of a “poetics” of the time—and Vilarós understands “poetics” in a wide sense that encompasses different manifestations of art, from literature to cinema—that is “abocada irremediabilmente a su propia destrucción” (1998: 55).

In the Spanish poetry of the second half of the twentieth century, two poets who see this well are Antonio Gamoneda and Félix Grande. Gamoneda and Grande are two remarkable examples of poets who made of their works a reflection on the political, sociological and ethical implications of silence, although not in a deliberate manner. Gamoneda’s *Descripción de la mentira* is structured around the subject of silence. Yet, silence in Gamoneda’s work has diverse connotations in comparison to the meaning Valente attributed to it: “Ciertamente es una historia horrible el silencio” (Gamoneda 2004: 181). *Blues castellano*, which had been censored, clarifies further the kind of silence to which he generally refers, a historically informed constellation of interconnected elements: trauma, violence, death, censorship, meekness and mendaciousness. Furthermore, both in *Blues castellano* and in *Descripción de la mentira*, there is an implicit allusion to silence as oblivion, willed oblivion due to resignation, but, also, the kind of oblivion which political repression forced and which can be equated with a lack of voice. Thus silence can signify the desperation—“la desesperación que no habla”—and the disgrace attached to repression:

Amo las bolsas de las madres.

Veo:

No hay dignidad sobre la tierra

como el cansancio sin pagar,

el rostro

aplastado

la desesperación que no habla. (2004: 97)

For Gamoneda, as for Grande, memory is a *surveillant* that keeps consciousness awake. In *Descripción de la mentira* he recurrently refers to attempts to keep oblivion at bay (“vigilar el olvido”). One of the lines in “¿Ocultar esto?”, from *Blues castellano* associates this state of alertness with consciousness: “Pero si cierra el vigilante, cierra/ la dentadura sobre la conciencia” (2004: 108). Silence is also a kind of non-linguistic and suffering type of memory that is ingrained in the body. That occurs when psychic inflicted damage exists as an experience still not articulated in words, and which can only prompt the verification of suffering in the flesh. He quotes Simone Weil: “La desgracia de los otros entró en mi carne” (2004: 93). This idea of suffering made flesh accrues in a kind of writing with origins in the material conditions of pain. Gamoneda has recently stated that his poetry is dependent on what he calls the “cultura de la pobreza”, which can be perfectly applied to Grande too (2007: 52). Both poets link the physical conditions of poverty to a source of poetical writing. Such a materialism of the flesh, which shares nothing with the well-being and hedonism of the body, but which is, rather, an indigent condition imposed on the body, is to be found in Grande and in one of the main influences on Grande, César Vallejo.

I have shown that silence does not necessarily have to be understood in the way that it was interpreted by the “poética del silencio”. Silence can be seen as much more than a literary technique, embracing matters inextricably attached to it, such as trauma, memory,

violence, censorship, exile, poverty, etc. The complexity of the topic makes it necessary to criticize of the reductive interpretation that silence has received in Spanish literary criticism. José Ángel Valente is a central figure of such a criticism, both as a poet and as a literary critic. Although his work is eminently valuable in its examination of the topic of silence and its relation to poetry, there are a few charges that can be levelled at his poetic thinking and these are, first, not having paid careful attention to all the questions involved in silence, to have written of it in a rather dogmatic way that excluded other views on the topic and, finally, to have placed too much emphasis on the inexpressibility of the word. Silence is central and haunts much of the Spanish poetry of the second half of the twentieth century. In order to discuss it, we need to address questions such as the imbrications of silence with memory and trauma.

## **2.7 Silence in language and the fashioning of the self**

*Ahora se sabe que la identidad personal es una torre demasiado frágil para sostenerse por sí sola, sin testigos cercanos que la certifiquen ni miradas que la reconozcan.*

(Antonio Muñoz Molina, *La noche de los tiempos*)

In this section I will discuss three interwoven aspects regarding the formation of the self: language, memory and nothingness. Theories that completely deprive the self of its autonomy will be revisited. Some clarification about how the self is construed is needed if we are to understand the topic of Grande's poetic self. It is necessary to rethink

several postulates about the self and language. On the one hand, the notion that language only points to nothingness will need revision. Some of the questions to be answered in this respect are: Can we consider nothingness as precisely the *raison d'être* of language? Furthermore, is nothingness the foundational void of the self? Can we consider language as a complete failure because it fails to transcend nothingness entirely?

On the other hand, I shall explore the relationship between language and the fictional. The questions to be posed are: If reality is founded on language, does it hold to continue to talk about the unreality of the real? Does not language imply something other than words? And, finally, I will address the question as to whether the self ought to be thought of as merely a cultural effect. Despite the fact that culture makes up a great part of what we call the self, can we attribute to the self some form of agency that can alter its subordination to culture? Can we think of the self in terms other than culture? Can we assign the self a zone of indeterminacy or nothingness? Does the self have access to this zone?

Ultimately, my aim is to reconcile two opposing conceptions of the self—the self as nothingness and the self as culture—which do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive but, rather, can be seen in combination in order to achieve a better understanding of the particular entity of the self. The thesis I will defend here is that we need a theory of the self that includes yet is not reduced to nothingness if we are to resolve the impasse created by postmodern theories that regard the self as a linguistic or cultural effect, or by those theories that deny the self altogether. Yet we also need to rethink the concept of nothingness. In other words, nothingness should be understood not as the denial of the self but—although this might seem paradoxical—as an essential



component, along with culture, in the formation of the self. Similarly, as will be seen, the power of culture upon the self will have to be limited. I am drawing here on Edgar Morin's definition of culture.<sup>62</sup> I will also take into account the idea that culture fluctuates between its conservation and evolution.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, I defend the idea that free uses of language and memory are the means for enabling the self to create itself by resisting two kinds of subordination that can be creative but may also constitute impediments to creation. I will also argue in favour of attributing agency to the self, even if limited by subjection.

I will begin by pinpointing the problems arising from considering the self a linguistic effect. The excessive importance given to a certain conception of language — language understood as external and autonomous—in the fashioning of the self has tended to cast aside the fact that the self is not only passively constructed by language but, also, that it inhabits a zone of indeterminacy, left to its own fashioning through conscious and unconscious linguistic and memory uses. Roland Barthes' famous statement that “le sujet n'est qu'un effet de langage” is scarcely reconcilable with the idea of agency behind any process of creation. Adriana Cavarero remarks:

Siamo in un ambito di riflessione che privilegia la centralità del testo inaugurata da Roland Barthes e resta in continua tensione con la formula per cui il sé è soltanto un

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<sup>62</sup> “La cultura, lo ripeto è costituita dall'insieme di abitudini, costumi, pratiche, saper fare, saperi, regole, norme, divieti, strategie, credenze, idee, valori, miti, che si perpetua di generazione in generazione, si riproduce in ciascun individuo, genera e rigenera la complessità sociale” (2002: 16).

<sup>63</sup> “In ogni società, la cultura è protetta, nutrita, mantenuta, rigenerata, senza che essa sia minacciata di estinzione, di dilapidazione, di distruzione” (Morin 2002: 16).

effetto di linguaggio. La questione del auto-bio-grafia è dunque pregiudizialmente focalizzata sul *graphein* a discapito sia del *bios* sia dell'*auto*. (2001: 92; my emphasis)

The second charge that can be levelled at the view of the self as a “linguistic effect” is that the subject remains vulnerable and lost among different conceptions of language. Thus the self is subordinated, as if it were a puppet, to two fundamental ideas about language: a) the formalist view of language, that is, language seen as black marks on a page—this view often leads to the assumption that language ultimately points to nothingness; and b) the subjective view of language—language seen as a subjective cultural discourse. Heidegger argued that we are not in control of language but that, rather, language “thinks us”. What is at stake in any of these two conceptions of language mentioned above is precisely the notion of agency.

It is not to be denied that the self attempts its own definition to a great degree only within the framework of the moulds provided by language and culture. This is what Kant called the “phenomenal sphere” of the self, in other words, that which is “causality-determined”, that is, the temporal dimension of the self (Žižek 2000: 25-26).<sup>64</sup> Certainly, the question of self-comprehension and self-definition takes place within certain schemes of comprehension (Kavolis 1984: 16). Such an idea is not controversial. Luis Rosales wrote that language “nace en una fuente remota del sentir colectivo” (1989: 9). And Valente is aware of the usufruct of the “palabras de la tribu” in any poetic employment of language: “Se escribe desde muy hondos posos, desde muy sumergidos ritmos de la lengua, que se nos imponen o hablan en nosotros” (cited in López de Castro 1999: 9).

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<sup>64</sup> Žižek also declares that “at this level, human beings are empirical entities whose behaviour can be explained by different sets of causal links” (2000: 27).

Furthermore, Bakhtin theorized the idea that literary genres were no other than the different collectively shared frames within which self-comprehension was attempted. Similarly, the idea that culture is necessary for existence is not controversial. Butler observes that “social categories signify subordination and existence at once” (1997: 20) and Edgar Morin states: “Il principale capitale umano è la cultura. L’essere umano sarebbe senza di essa un primate del più basso rango” (2002: 16).

Notwithstanding the above, what remains, however, a “quandary”, to use Butler’s word, is the question of the autonomy, agency or consciousness of the self. According to Butler, the self is endowed with agency but this agency paradoxically emerges from its subordination. She uses the word “power” to refer to that which is not only subordination but, also, the condition of the possibility for agency. While Butler argues that any idea of the self must be grounded on subordination to pre-existing conditions that she calls “power”, she also recognizes that the self’s appropriation of those conditions for becoming a subject “may involve an alteration of power” (1997: 13).<sup>65</sup> In this sense, culture as a form of power which reproduces itself in each individual—“si riproduce in ciascun individuo” (Morin 2002: 15)—does not have to be necessarily regarded as an insurmountable obstacle for individual self-creation, given that the self, even if radically conditioned, can alter power. It remains, nevertheless, a paradox that the self needs culture and at the same time autonomy from culture, to define itself, or, in other words, the self takes its autonomy from subordination to culture, understood as a form of power. However, although Butler’s definition of power is flexible, she seems to be limiting her

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<sup>65</sup> Butler defines power as follows: “Power is, as subordination, a set of conditions that precedes the subject, effecting and subordinating the subject from the outside” (1997: 13).

discussion to the temporal dimension of the self, as she refers to power as “not static structures, but temporalized—active and productive” (1997: 16). What is more problematical is her situation of power as preceding the self, “effecting and subordinating the subject from the outside” (1997: 13). Is this not in contradiction with her recognition above that the subject can alter power? Besides, does not power in effect become “internal” when it is interiorized by the self? Can one really say power is always external? If the subject can alter power and, therefore, contributes to the forming of power in some sense, does power really precede the subject? On another occasion Butler illustrates this contradiction when she claims that “the subject is neither fully determined by power nor fully determining of power” (1997: 17). Is she, thus, conceding the active role of the self in the configuration of power? It seems so.

Thus what I am proposing here is an argument that seems to be less problematical than just considering the self a mere linguistic or cultural effect: culture and language and the self interface and feed back to one another and both culture and language equally allow for and condition the autonomy of the self.

In order to see how culture and language can allow for the possibility for agency in the self we need to introduce another dimension in the discussion of agency: nothingness. Introducing nothingness in the debate not only avoids mechanical views of subordination but, also, offers, in my opinion, a full account of the notion of agency. Nothingness, as opposed to the temporal dimension of power to which Butler referred above as “not static”, would appear to be, instead, unchangeable and, still, elicit change. Blanchot speaks of a “crack”: “a fissure which would be constitutive of the self, or would

reconstitute itself as the self, but not as a cracked self” (1995: 78). Nothingness should be understood as the “condition of the possibility for creation”. I am using the expression employed by Butler with regard to power, since it can be equally applied to nothingness. Butler argues that the self maintains an ambivalent relation with the forces or powers that act as pre-conditions to its own becoming, and that this relation is marked by necessary subordination and resistance to them (Butler 1997: 13). She states that: “the subject is itself a site of ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the *effect* of a prior power and as the *condition of possibility* for a radically conditioned form of agency” (1997: 15). I believe that Butler’s view of the relationship between agency and power, which she limits to the temporal dimension of being, can be applied to nothingness, which can be regarded as another kind of power, which is not simply temporal or temporalized, because it is linked to the eternal: death. Thus, rephrasing my quotation of Butler above, it can be equally argued that the self maintains an ambivalent relation to nothingness which acts as a pre-condition to its own becoming—Bachelard in a similar vein refers to the void as “being the raw material of possibility of being” (1994: 218) and that this relation is marked by necessary subordination and resistance to nothingness, which is, ultimately, subordination and resistance to death.

It should be noted that death and nothingness are not exactly the same thing and, yet, nothingness can be taken as deriving from the experience of the most impenetrable nothingness, which is death. Nothingness is also that which we do not know and yet we could discover. Many of the mysteries surrounding the self have been dissipated and yet, death will always remain an opaque nothingness, without the possibility of being fully illuminated.

If the self is not merely a cultural effect and should be considered also as agency, Cavarero's "sé narrabile" (narrative self), this is precisely because culture fails to explain the self away insofar as there will always remain a region of silence or nothingness that inhabits it. This principle of nothingness—death—which is behind all creation, acts on the self and it is the origin of self-reflexivity and self-creation. Culture does not liberate the self from death. Both culture and the self are grounded on the foundational problem of death. It is the consciousness of death that elicits creation: "La formidabile breccia che la coscienza della morte apre al proprio interno ha fatto sorgere le più grandiose mitologie che la occultano, ma senza farla sparire" (Morin 2002: 27). Hence, creation is subordinated to death as much as it needs to transcend and resist it. Morin indicates here that human mythology, created to overcome death, has not managed to "make it disappear". This is because death is the foundational nothingness of culture and of the self at the same time as the condition of preserving its existence. Paradoxically, we need the notions of nothingness and death in order to keep the human process of creation going. It is precisely their overcoming that elicits in the self an ontological need to leave behind itself, before its demise, a unique story, its story, which notwithstanding lacunae and instability in the unity of its account, is unique insofar as "è diversa da tutte le altre proprio perché con molte altre è costitutivamente intrecciata" (Cavarero 2001: 95).

The fact that culture does not, cannot, transcend death causes antagonism between the human mind and culture. According to Edgar Morin:

La cultura riempie un vuoto lasciato [...] dalla incompiutezza biologiche. In questo vuoto se instaurano le sue norme, i suoi principi e i suoi programmi. [...] La cultura è ciò che permette di apprendere e di conoscere, ma è anche ciò che impedisce di

apprendere e di conoscere fuori dai suoi imperativi e dalle sue norme, ciò che provoca antagonismo tra la mente umana e la sua cultura. (2002: 16)

The contingency and arbitrariness that culture also presupposes in the definition of the self, because it cannot contain the self entirely (“the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound” [Butler 1997: 17]) and the fact that the self can immerse itself in different types of subordination, reflect on these subordinations and, up to a point, choose them, can account for the ontological role of death in its creation, in combination with the formative role of culture. The self can escape a specific culture, give up a language and become trained in the mental structures of another language—to clarify, it cannot escape being immersed in culture and language but it can adopt an active and reflexive attitude toward them—yet the self cannot escape nor change death. And it is the relationship of the self with the absolute nothingness of death that ultimately elicits its self-creation, because it is the self’s consciousness of its own death that leads to self-consciousness or self-reflexivity—self-reflexivity that the self will also apply to its temporal subordinations, allowing it to alter them—which is at the core of human subjectivity. To be more precise, the contradiction of death at the center of the self’s conscience elicits creation:

È la coscienza realista della morte che suscita il mito: provoca un tale orrore che si nega, si devia e si supera nei miti in cui l’individuo o sopravvive come spettro o come *doppio* (la vita primaria – unicellulare, cellula – utilizza lo sdoppiamento, e così lotta contro la morte. Il tema universale del doppio, non ha forse questa lontana origine?), o rinasce come umano o animale. [...] La morte come idea dell’annientamento di sé introduce la contraddizione, la desolazione e l’orrore nel cuore del soggetto, essere

egocentrico che è tutto per se stesso, ma che sa di essere nello stesso tempo un essere per la morte, cioè votato al nulla; questa contraddizione tra il tutto e il nulla diviene la fonte più profonda dell'angoscia umana [...] Ma questa contraddizione diviene nello stesso tempo la fonte più profonda della mitologia umana. (Morin 2002: 27-28)

The self's objectifying of death is at the core of its becoming a "subject"; it is a formative experience:

L'estrema oggettivazione della morte, decomposizione e annientamento, va di pari passo con la sua estrema soggettivazione poiché è il soggetto che si trova annientato. [...] La morte è l'unione dell'oggettivazione e della soggettivazione assolute. (Morin 2002: 60)

Yet becoming a subject involves the self becoming an "object" for itself, as will be seen in the case of Grande's poetic self when some of his poems are analyzed:

È a partire di questa capacità che l'individuo umano ha preso coscienza per la prima volta di sé oggettivandosi nel suo "doppio", poichè lo spirito umano ha potuto auto-esaminarsi, praticare l'introspezione, l'autoanalisi, il dialogo con se stesso. Paradosso: l'oggettività non può venire che da un soggetto. Idea incredibile per coloro che hanno soggettivamente negato ogni esistenza al soggetto. (Morin 2002: 59-60)

Thus both nothingness and culture are necessary for creation: nothingness, understood as that which does not exist but that can exist because it is conceivable, that is, understood as the possibility of coming into existence, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, culture. The two are conditions of possibility for agency, above all, nothingness, without which invention could not be. I claim that these two views of the self are not



exclusive but equally necessary. Nothingness prevents the self from merely reinstating or reproducing power, as shall be seen further on in this section, and culture permits the self not to remain an emptiness condemned to silence.

In her examination regarding the status of the question of agency in autobiography today, as to whether the self is capable of self-representing, Molero de la Iglesia states:

En toda reflexión sobre la textualización de la subjetividad está presente el papel deformante del lenguaje [...] tampoco hay dudas sobre el origen cultural de la identidad, cuyos modelos dependen de los códigos y convenciones que en cada momento estructuran el pensamiento [...] Pero el hecho de que el yo escrito tome su forma de la cultura, y en especial de aquellos discursos narrativos que, por considerarse prototípicos, se erigen en autoridad, no niega la capacidad biográfica de la autobiografía, puesto que también el vivir se ajusta a esos modelos. (2000: 24)

Now, this practice of making subjectivity textual to which Molero de la Iglesia was referring, can be illustrated by the practices of intertextuality and deconstruction. Intertextuality does not take into account the existence of an agency, capable of elaborating images of itself and the world around it through its literary imagination. The idea of the inability of the self to represent itself has been questioned by literary critics and to a great extent it has been surmounted or nuanced. Some critics have acknowledged that the practice of deconstruction makes it also very difficult or even excludes altogether the possibility of discussing the very same idea of the self, as Punday (2000) observes:

One of the principal charges leveled at deconstruction is that it allows the individual no room to act against the discursive systems that function within the culture, since the

subordination of reality to textuality implies that no real-world act can affect this textual play.

According to Adriana Cavarero:

Le biografie e le autobiografie, prima di essere luoghi testuali di un'ermeneutica raffinata e professionale, sono infatti delle storie di vita narrate per iscritto. Per quanto necessariamente costruite secondo i canoni più svariati, a seconda dell'epoca e dei gusti, esse raccontano di un sé narrabile la cui identità, unica e irripetibile, è quella che andiamo a cercare nelle pagine del testo. (2001: 95)

When memory is accordingly studied from the view of the textual practice of deconstruction, it is examined in the light of the merely textual, without taking into consideration that memory belongs, to put it in Cavarero's words, to a "sé narrabile la cui identità, [è] unica e irripetibile". That is, memory goes beyond the textual, engages with not necessarily linguistic processes such as "il fluire della azione da cui la storia di vita è risultata" (2001: 95). Ricoeur devotes a great part of his works to explaining how action helps to shape narrative identity. Thus literary practices such as intertextuality and deconstruction make it more difficult to confer some agency to the self. Yet the idea of the self in literature should not and cannot be abandoned, even if it is no longer possible to go back to the logocentric model, that is, the idea of "author" as the entity from which the text originates and takes all its significance. Bennett agrees that we cannot neglect the question of authorship: "[...] literary criticism is inextricably engaged in studying questions of authorship" (2005: 112).

One way out of the blind spot created by making subjectivity textual is thinking of the author as giving form to an absence. Such an absence is opposed to the temporal or culturally informed dimension of the self and points to another level: the eternal dimension of nothingness. In this zone of indetermination the self is in the constant process of becoming.<sup>66</sup> The re-discovery of nothingness in relation to being can be attributed in our contemporary times to Sartre: “[...] a new component of the real has just appeared to us—non-being” (2003: 5). In reality, the concept of the self must necessarily originate from absence that symbolic activity —above all language—attempts to overcome. According to Heidegger, the first function of language is to name and to give birth to what would otherwise remain an eternity of death and silence and it is precisely this characteristic of language, its ability to name, that allows us to envisage the empty too:

[To bring] what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time. Where there is no language, as in the being of stone, plant and animal, there is also no openness of what is, and consequently no openness either of that which is not and of the empty. (2002: 73)

The modern recognition that language points to the absence it attempts to overcome does not entail that it is useless in transcending this lack. On the contrary, language has to a large degree effectively managed to transcend silence, emptiness. According to George Steiner: “It is language that severs man from [...] the silences that inhabit the greater part

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<sup>66</sup> I borrow the concept of becoming from Deleuze (1998) who, in his turn, has borrowed it from Bergson. See Bergson (1988).

of being” (1982: x). What I would like to discuss here is that the postmodern view of language as always pointing to silence has confused and mistaken, to a great extent, the reason why language sprang up in the first place, namely, the existence of nothingness, by almost turning nothingness into language’s “end”, as if language were there to serve the end of disclosing nothingness and silence. Brook explains this well in her analysis of the modern crisis of the word (some times called “the critique of language”). She refers to the changing of the rhetorical device of inexpressibility, which originated in the Greek tradition and which led from a certain mistrust in language to express realities such as the divine in the thirteenth century or to communicate emotions in the nineteenth century, toward the transformation of such a rhetorical device into the principal *leitmotiv* of postmodern poetry: the radical negation of language. Thus whilst for the modernist poets there was still some confidence in poetry, the postmodern attitude consists in utterly denying the ability of language to express. According to Brook:

For them [the Modernists], although transcendent notions might be considered beyond the reach of the word, the concrete thing, the gentian, was not. And for them, there was the optimistic belief that through various forms of experimentation something real could be brought into language, that language was more than the play of words.

(2002:14)

Brook states that after Modernism “the relationship between signifier and signified, and between language and reality” was rendered “increasingly problematic”, to the point that “all reality becomes inexpressible in language” (2002: 14). Yet this assertion is a contradiction in terms, for even if the only thing language could express is that it cannot

express, we would nevertheless be *expressing* a concept. In other words, if we are able to conceive of the concept of nothingness, then this entails that nothingness is not all there is, for we can state something about nothingness and such a possibility is a fact.

Nevertheless, inexpressibility became the *topos* of postmodern literature. However, the employment of this commonplace by poets and writers who used it as a theme or made of it an rhetorical technique, has nothing to do with the kind of inexpressibility proper to trauma as will be seen further on. Nothingness seems to be more genuinely reflected upon and conveyed when it is not a “subject” or “theme” consciously thought out or used deliberately as an expressive tool. On the contrary, nothingness, if it is to be authentically so, must necessarily inhabit the poem in ways that the poet is not able to identify or decide upon beforehand.

The other germane question that remains to be discussed in relation to this is the question of whether or not any individual linguistic exercise of self-construction is bound to be merely fictional. Such seems to be the conclusion reached by a conception of the self as a “linguistic effect” which discards agency, as shown by M. H. Abrams below:

[...] Derrida solicits us to follow him in his move [...] This move is from what he calls the closed “logocentric” model of all traditional or “classical” views of language [...] to what I shall call his own graphocentric model, in which the sole presences are marks-on-blanks [...] Since the only given are already-existing marks, “*déjà écrit*”, are denied recourse to a speaking or writing subject, or ego, or cogito, or consciousness and so to any possible agency for the intention of meaning something (“*vouloir dire*”); all such agencies are relegated to the status of fictions generated by language, readily dissolved by deconstructive analysis. (1977: 429)

Paul de Man (1979) argues that, as language is the only means for achieving self-knowledge, any attempt to establish the “truth” about oneself is condemned to founder on the realization that language always mediates between our desires and the Real. In this critic’s objection to the achievement of “truth” through language, there is an implicit recognition of a consciousness: for do desires not have a source? Can this source be other than the self? In any case, what is taken for granted in both Derrida and De Man’s views is a vision of language as a useless instrument to access any reality at all, which consequently blurs the distinction between autobiography and fiction, making all autobiographical writing fictional.<sup>67</sup> Such a distinction, however, needs to exist from the perspective of memory, because memory also connects non-linguistic realities with words, and is linked to the questions of commitment or intentionality. Intentionality and commitment are not textual entities. And they form part of the creative process. Recently, there has been a proliferation of works that recuperate the concept of intentionality. According to Bo Pettersson, the premises behind textuality are clearly ideological and, as a consequence, textuality has lost force and intentionality has, again, been brought into forth:

We should be aware that its [the term “text”] spread was based on specific, tendentious, even ideological, view of the humanities as well as the social sciences, which quite

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<sup>67</sup> I would like to mention in passing that postmodern ideas of language deserve credit only if they leave space for other conceptions of language. As Erickson (2001) observes, the problem with postmodernism is that it encourages freedom of reading at the same time as guarding itself against criticism, without realizing that the same spirit of freedom that postmodernism stirs may be behind the anti-postmodernism’s critique. This undermines the credibility of postmodernism. Erickson writes: “Certain problems with postmodernism have been becoming increasingly evident. One of these is the problem of autoreferentiality: postmodernism’s failure to apply its tenets to its own view” (2001: 233). He also asks why deconstruction cannot be deconstructed.

blatantly advocated a textualist view of not only literature but culture in general [...] By a decisive severing of the connection between author and text in “The Death of the author” the authority of the author and his or her intentions were so forcefully ousted that it took literary studies (despite philosophical aestheticians and a few other exceptions) a generation before intentional issues were again brought under scrutiny. (2005: 134 and 138)

Thus the inclusion of categories such as intentionality and commitment leads to the realization, as observed by Deleuze, that “a text is merely a small cog in an extra-textual practice [...] that prolongues the text” (1998: xvi). Hence, of importance is the distinction of the intentionality or the degree of commitment to truth in literature produced to bear witness to historical events, namely the testimonial literature produced by political prisoners in Francoist prisons, or Primo Levi’s account of his Holocaust experience, and any other kind of literature whose production obeys a different intentionality or commitment to truth. When it comes to bearing witness to testimony, the commitment, as Derrida puts it, consists in this: “I promise you to tell the truth and to be faithful to my promise and to engage myself to be faithful” (2005: 76). The only flaw in Derrida’s argument is his assertion that such a commitment does not have a “probative demonstration” and therefore cannot bear on theoretic-epistemic knowledge (2005: 76). However, the problem with such a notion of truth as needing probative demonstration is contradicted by our everyday experience: we live in a world where many of our shared truths are not demonstratable. And although the questions of commitment and intentionality are difficult to discern, that should not prevent us from approaching them, for they are, as observed by Bennett and Pettersson, central to literary criticism.

Similarly, to think of autobiography as a “truthful” account and fiction as “fictional” seems as categorical and reductive as blurring the line between autobiography and fiction.

According to Kavolis:

The autobiographical text in the strict sense differs from the other literary texts, which always retain an autobiographical aspect, not in that the former necessarily provides more informative content or more truthful documentation than the latter, but that it constitutes a firmer, more unconditional (private or public) commitment to a particular way of comprehending oneself. “Fictionalized autobiography” or “autobiographical fiction”, in contrast, leave open the possibility of an escape from a binding commitment into a conditional perhaps so-perhaps not so statement, one of several possible statements, by which the author’s identity is not responsibly bound. But precisely because autobiography—particularly autobiography intended for publication—is so firmly committed to a particular mode of self-comprehension, it may be less revealing of those aspects of one’s own experience of oneself to which one is either less committed or which cannot be firmly grasped, than does fiction, poetry, the visual arts, and music. (1984: 21)

Hence, the latter demonstrates that literary texts disclose aspects of the real not graspable by other forms of self-writing. In fact, imagination, frequently seen as a source of fiction, is instead regarded as a real component of the self (Ricoeur 2000: 146) and, what seems most interesting, imagination does not exclusively belong to the realm of literature, since imagination is constantly put into play in any cognitive activity, including scientific thinking. Therefore, the question is not whether imagination is present or absent in cognitive processes other than the processes of literary creation, but, rather, it is a



matter of commitment to self-comprehension, as observed above. According to Mark Freeman too, imagination is a component of the Real: “Yes, self and world are fundamentally products of the imagination. But no, they are not to be thought of as merely imaginary, in the sense of being essentially fictional creations” (2003: 70). Similarly, Ruth Ronen declares that: “[...] fictional worlds are worlds possessing some kind of concrete reality” (2005: 354).

It is clear that in order to be able to talk about imagination as an element of the Real there needs to be a transition from a naïve idea of realism toward a theory of constructive realism. And that implies a form of understanding not as verifiable facts or as “raw” material but as a construction. If we see the world as an array of scattered elements, whose gaps and inconsistencies memory and imagination attempt to supplant, then we need to concede that art creates its own truth. Caballero Bonald states: “Únicamente soy/ mi libertad y mis palabras” (2004: 163).

To fashion oneself through free uses of language does not entail discarding memory. Memory constitutes the foundation of the freedom to linguistic creation by establishing the limits within which creation occurs. Real creative freedom takes place in the framework of boundaries. According to Bakhtin, “without constraints of the right sort [wrong constraints would be state censorship] neither freedom nor creativity [...] can be real” (cited in Morson and Emerson 1990: 43). We tend to privilege freedom over memory, in reality, as Caballero Bonald reminds us too, memory does not restrain but makes creative freedom possible: “Mengua su libertad aquel que olvida/ que es su propio recuerdo quien lo salva” (2004:175). Memory, language and imagination are the “ingredients” of the identity of the self. Such recognition implies that it is arbitrary to talk

about a “real” and a “fictionalized” self. According to Ricoeur and his followers, such as Freeman, we need to think anew the idea of the author and its relation to his or her fictionalized self: “The creativity of the author and the individuality of the self, are intimately related; they are, we might say, two sides of the same coin” (2003: 68). In other words, what an author writes in creative exercises of imagination forms part of the identity of its self.

This idea has found ample support and is increasingly gaining credence in contemporary literary theory and criticism.<sup>68</sup> A significant case is the aforementioned one of Philippe Lejeune. Francisco Brines agrees with Lejeune:

Al escribir solemos añadir al texto nuevas realidades que, aunque sólo fuesen imaginativas, alcanzan la misma necesidad y verdad que el núcleo originador, y que gravitan con no menor fuerza. [...] Mas no olvidemos que el poema está siempre escrito desde el hombre [...] todo en el poema está haciendo referencia única al que lo ha escrito, nada hay que no dependa de él. La autonomía de la experiencia poética respecto de la experiencia vital que mayoritariamente lo origina admite grados, pero siempre tienen ambas en común su absoluta dependencia respecto de una misma persona. Alguna vez, y es caso extremo, la concreta experiencia vital que me impulsa a la realización no aparece para nada en el poema; éste la rechaza y, allí está, lleva una

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<sup>68</sup> See for instance, to cite just a few examples, the works of Ricoeur (1984 and 1992), Eakin (1999) and Freeman (2000). Even those who have been traditionally skeptical about the relation of author and work in our day have ended up conceding that the author is, at least, a ghostly presence in the work. One of the most important books published recently on this subject is Bennett (2005). In it, Bennett declares that the author’s presence in his or her work cannot be completely denied. He writes: “(even Barthes, especially Barthes, reserves a certain desire for the author, needs him or her when he talks about “the pleasure of the text, about the pleasure that he gets from literary texts”. And he quotes Barthes: “in a way, I desire the author: I need his figure... as he needs mine” (2005: 117).

máscara que la invisibiliza o es puro vacío: el único lector que sabe de su fantasmal presencia es el propio autor. (1999: 21-22)

The writer Carlos Fuentes shares the view that imagination, that is to say, the imaginative component of memory, for without memory there is no creation, creates reality, of the self and the world:

La imaginación y el lenguaje, la memoria y el deseo, son no sólo la materia viva de la novela, sino el sitio de encuentro de nuestra humanidad inacabada [...] la novela no sólo refleja realidad, sino que crea una realidad nueva, una realidad que antes no estaba allí (Don Quijote, Madam Bovary, Stephen Dedalus) pero sin la cual ya no podríamos concebir la realidad misma. (2002: 205 and 198)

Summing up, I have tried to show three things here. The self is not a mere “linguistic effect” whose reality is a “discursive effect”. The self is also a kind of emptiness which re-shapes, that is to say, fashions itself through its linguistic uses of imagination. The self is, as Lejeune puts it, its *récits*, be they literary works or not. Among the *récits* of the self are found rational discourses, as in narratives of the self guided by logic and historical precision, but, also, the self is constituted by imaginative discourses fraught with desire and emotion. And the latter is as real, that is, tells us as much about the self, as the former. The poet and novelist Manuel Rivas notes that literature is, in “su forma de pensar’, próxima al ‘pensamiento salvaje’: el espacio donde la razón es sensorial”.<sup>69</sup> Antonio Gamoneda agrees:

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<sup>69</sup> Manuel Rivas, in an on-line interview with the readers of *El País* (15-11-2006).

La finalidad de la poesía es la creación de placer y la creación de un conocimiento distinto del que proporciona el pensamiento reflexivo, por ejemplo, es de otra naturaleza. La poesía nace de la vida. Se trata de un saber no sabiendo y de un entender no entendiendo. (2006: 55)

Similarly, Valente has written that poetry is a “pensar no interrogativo” akin to a “presentimiento”. There is, he declares, “un saber del corazón, which does not need to be sought, it is a “pasivo entender” (2004: 8-9).

To be sure, in addressing the questions of self-writing and fictionality, what I propose here is to reconsider the notion of accuracy, and to begin to talk, rather, of fidelity to the past. In its search for a certain truth memory is, according to Ricoeur, faithful to the past. This is precisely where any credibility or veracity of memory should reside. The focus of memory recuperates the idea that in any act of creation there is a consciousness that creates. If we refuse to see memory as an intertextual exercise and, more accurately, drawing on Memory Studies, start to see memory as a cognitive process, in the first place, then we can conclude that it implies more than the anxiety of influence, to use Harold Bloom’s well-known expression.

### 3. Language, memory and forgetting in Grande's work

#### 3.1 Surviving separation through language

*Si uno no tuviera confianza en las palabras ¿en qué?*

Juan Gelman (*El País*, 29-11-07)

*La palabra*

*que entrega lo perdido*

(Juan Gelman, *Incompletamente*)

Apparently, Grande's poetic voice's relationship with the signifier is one of overt trustfulness and submissive dependence. In reality, it is more ambivalent. The poetic voice celebrates the signifier as that which holds the power to overcome separation. And yet its traumatic attachment to words shows the problematic nature of this relationship. In Chapter IV, this neurotic approach to words will be analyzed in further detail. Here more positive aspects in the poetic voice's approach to language will be explored.

Two remarkable characteristics in the poetic voice's relationship with language are the contentment and consolation begot in the act of writing. There is a sense of perplexity and joyful bewilderment ("deslumbramiento") embedded in the playing with words, like a child who begins to learn how to use words plays with their internal rhythms. Grande's initiation to writing occurred when he discovered poetry by way of the reading of poems with a friend, Carlos Sahagún:

Yo escribía como a quien le llevan de la mano: feliz: descubriendo el lenguaje. *Taranto* es para mí esa porción de deslumbramiento y de felicidad que toca un niño con las sílabas cuando empieza a reunir las. (2001: 14-15)

*Taranto* (1961) is Grande's first publication. The book was written in homage to the Peruvian César Vallejo, an influence on the poetry of many other Grande's contemporaries.

In order to understand the poetic voice's admiration for words one must consider two recurrently present ideas in his work—love and demise of love, that is, separation, which is felt by the poetic voice as a kind of death. Love and separation (death) can be taken to refer to an array of diverse and interconnected questions. They are present in the metaphor of “eternal stones”, in the opening poem of *Las piedras*:

... y llevamos la cabeza  
esclava  
entre dos piedras eternas  
  
Piedra del amor a un lado,  
el amor que se hizo piedra,  
no estatua, significado,  
símbolo; no: piedra, piedra.  
  
Piedra del horror al otro,  
el horror que nos golpea

desde el centro de la muerte

que habita en nuestra conciencia.<sup>70</sup> (55)

Stone is the word with which the poetic voice signals both the beginning and the end of life. In “Generación”, from *Taranto*, the first stone is a date, 1937, the year in which the author was born. The two eternal stones (love and death) can be understood as alluding to general notions of both physical and spiritual unity and separation. Grande’s poems constantly call attention to these two conditions governing human existence, a reminder of our dual reality. On the one hand, they are evoked as two physical sensations (“Amar y morir son dos/ sensaciones corpulentas”), their physicality being ceaselessly present, embodied for the poet in the woman and materialized in objects growing old and ragged. Such an association of *thanatos* with the impulse of erotic love refers us to the Freudian notion of “death drive”. On the other hand, the semantic field of love and death extends further to encompass a worldview that engages with certain ideas about language and memory. The poetic voice relates love and language, in that it confides in the reassuring capacity of language (and memory) to unify, to hold together and give coherence to what is dismembered and disaggregated.<sup>71</sup>

This view of language as a unifying force that connects and gathers stems almost from an imperious need. Even when the poetic voice adopts the viewpoint of death, language is useful in that it holds together the self through a discourse that confers

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<sup>70</sup> In Rafael Alberti’s *La arboleda perdida* we find an echo of Grande’s view of the entanglement of love and death: “El placer y la muerte son paralelos. Se dice que en el momento de morir un último estremecimiento seminal corre entre las temblorosas piernas” (1996: 38).

<sup>71</sup> Eros referred to erotic and maternal love has the mark of death but understood as the opposite of death drive it is related to knowledge and *jouissance*.

coherence. The ability of language to speak of and from death does not represent for the poetic voice separation as silence does. Absence of language (silence) symbolizes for the poetic voice an irreparable fracture with that which lives.

On occasions the poetic voice seeks the articulation of its own linguistic identity through identification with either death or that which is unnameable. The poetic self's positioning in the place of death seems to seek to transcend a precariousness and vulnerability that would lead to its own dissolution. In *Memoria del flamenco* it is stated: "Mediante el horror de pensar lo que era poco menos que impensable el yo y el otro comenzaban a confundirse y a ser una empresa común" (1999: 444). "El otro" (the Other in me, death) elicits the confrontation with the unknown, the unnameable, resulting in a fusion and con-fusion with it. This leads to the paradox that language becomes both a conduit to transcend silence as much as it reproduces the frontier and limits to cognition which death represents. Given death's opacity the poetic voice's words result in the illusion of appropriating death through its introjection. Identification with death in and through language creates the imaginary effect of unity, by causing the restoration of a missing link. An invisible tie that has to do with a lack of suture among the past and the present: "el vago temblor de su pasado y su presente, aún ambos sin soldar" (153).

By grounding its identity on loss and death the poetic voice ultimately seeks to prevent disintegration and dissolution into nothingness. However, its recourse to the language of death to substitute for separation and traumatic loss perpetuates the same gap that such an employment of language attempts to avoid. The poetic voice contradictorily confronts the separation inherent in death with images of death themselves. And yet the creation of these representations contributes paradoxically to the formation of a less



destructive identity as well as opening up the possibility of a mirage of unity. If death is that which is repressed, even in love, then its continuous exposition establishes the condition of its hopeful disclosing (even a glimpse). Any other form of employment of language is condemned as spiteful jargon (“jerga vil”, 309) that produces repression (it suffocates), as “Elogio a mi nación de carne y de fonemas” illustrates:

Los que sin fervor comen del gran pan del idioma  
y lo usan con adorno o coraza o chantaje  
sienten por mí un rechazo donde la rabia asoma:  
yo no he llamado patria más que a ti y al lenguaje. (309)

Grande is opposed to a use of language that silences and causes repression. For the poet the purposes of language engage with a lack of plenitude, a certain irrepressible void he attempts to fill. Precisely, by way of speaking from death in order to avoid separation, the poet experiences vicinity with the divine, the enigmatic and the sacred. It is only by taking the latter into account that the poetic voice’s recourse to self-aggression implicit in the adoption of death’s viewpoint and constant masochism might be explained. We can then understand how apparently separation produces joy, precisely because it is not such, the poetic voice prevents it by speaking with the voice of the eternal:

Tendremos, como todos los humanos, una separación  
Pero a partir de ese momento nuestras horas serán ya irreparables  
como las de los dioses. Alégrate, mujer, alégrate  
porque no quedará un solo lugar sobre la tierra

donde podemos encontrar el olvido, la paz, el apetito, el sueño. (357)

It comes as no surprise, then, – given the repairing mechanisms found in language – that the poet sees language and love as his only habitable nation, which he worships like a god:

La carne me ha enseñado el más hondo saber  
y el lenguaje me enseña su lección venerable:  
que el Tiempo es un abrazo del hombre y la mujer,  
que el universo es una palabra formidable. (309)

Love entails preserving at any cost the unity of memory and language, even if it involves unbearable pain: “ni pidas socorro al olvido [...] sin este tormento que llega en la memoria/ tu soledad sería mortal” (308). The action of keeping memory reunited, and avoiding its tearing apart, even if fallible or beset with suffering, is also an act of love, as Cernuda declares in “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra” from *Las nubes*: “Pero en la vida todo/Huye cuando el amor quiere fijarlo” (1993: 315). Like Cernuda, the poetic voice in Grande’s work does not delude itself in this respect. It knows too well the devastating effects of time :

Las cosas nacen, fulgen,  
se arruinan, son recuerdos  
recuerdos capitales  
que se avienen a menos,  
recuerdos veniales

que van y van cediendo  
mientras la nada cunde  
por afuera y por dentro,  
hasta que un día el hombre  
se pregunta ¿estoy muerto?

Y quizá hace ya siglos  
que yacía bajo el tiempo. (89)

When memory retreats, nothingness (death) takes over. And yet memory stands as the only useful antidote. It is an aggregating force which eventually fixes the fragmentation that time brings about. It establishes some unity, even if this is precarious or transient. Without unity there is no life that can be called as such, nor is the idea of self possible. Behind this idea there is no particular school of thought, apart from the quotation by Luis Rosales, “lo vivo era lo junto” (1996: 187), which might have had a bearing on the poetic voice’s own ideas.<sup>72</sup> Language, which is to a great extent the embodiment of memory, serves this very same purpose of containing and holding things together. Thus it comes as no surprise that the critique of language and its result, its emphatic enhancement of the inextricable haunting of nothingness in language, has not received Grande’s endorsement. He argues that we need language to deal with nothingness. If we assume that language is no more than nothingness, what other kind of

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<sup>72</sup> Ricoeur (1992) defends the idea that identity must be based on at least certain fixity within constant change.

“language” can be used to deal with nothingness? According to Grande, there are no other means for dealing with nothingness. Therefore, without language (and this includes music) we would be condemned to the “discourse” of silence. Language means for Grande the rebuttal of nothingness. Thus by nurturing our love for language, our own identity is enhanced. If love fails, language diminishes too and so does identity:

El desamor nos vacía de lenguaje [...] La vida era lo junto y, de pronto, la unidad se disgrega, y el yo se queda absorto y fragmentado, sin el alivio de poderse reconocer. Es algo que habla en otro idioma. Un idioma ininteligible, que duele porque es desconocido, porque nos condena a una rencorosa, desvalida mudez. (1996: 188)

Behind the association of muteness and suffering there is the fear of asymbolia. Separation from language, silence, means the impossibility of symbolic apprehension as a defense mechanism from depression. Kristeva in *Black Sun* puts it this way: “the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into the blankness of asymbolia” (1989: 33). The poetic voice’s rejection of the idea that silence illuminates existence must be understood in the context of the relationship between silence and suicide. There is the poet’s realization that while nothingness (death) can be conceived of, resignation to it cannot. He resists the notion that silence and nothingness are epiphanies on the grounds that they constitute a premature death. Therefore, Grande condemns the certitude with which it is often expressed in the language of those poets who exercise a critique of language. In the following paragraph it is difficult not to see the poet’s critique of the modern crisis of the word, incarnated in the so-called “poética del silencio”:

La separación nos roba el ser –o nos lo escamotea— y nos deja únicamente el alvéolo de ser: algo parecido a la nada. ¿Y ahora? ¿Y ahora? Ah, ahora, los más apresurados identifican esa experiencia de supremo analfabetismo, de clamorosa e impúdica ignorancia, con la conciencia de la muerte y con un nuevo orden donde reina la nada. Pero los más humildes, muy trabajosamente, muy lentamente, corazón, muy despacio, inician, con cuidado conmovedor, la reconquista del lenguaje. (1996: 188)

The above passage can be taken as exerting a veiled critique of a form of criticism that regarded silence as a brilliant achievement of thought. Implicit in the revering of silence is the mistrust in the idea that the poet is able to create a dwelling in and through language. Grande considers this discourse of silence as utter illiteracy, clamorous and shameless ignorance. According to him, the prestige of silence and nothingness was engendered by an insufficiently thought-out view of the implications of the issue. Grande believes that it is precisely language that which “saves” us, gives us a habitable space to protect us from chaos. It is a home and a shelter, which makes it admirable: “[palabra] que intentas construirme un mundo en este mundo” (98). Furthermore, the poet cannot imagine life without language: “sin ti, mi vida ya no sé lo que sería / algo como un sonido que no se puede oír” (98).

Lack of language, compared to a silent music, is diminishing of individual and social life. One of the poetic images that he uses to refer to language is “fire”, around which humanity gathers together to warm itself. This image of language recalls Valente’s “palabras de la tribu”. Grande does not ignore the fact that language is necessarily a collective creation and that poetry itself emanates from collective feelings and emotions. More precisely, universal human feelings (“las emociones oceánicas” [1999: 129]) have a

history behind them and that history is not individual, but rather a painstakingly collective creation of humankind. Without that backdrop one could not even think of writing a poem. In this respect he recognizes his indebtedness to collections of collective literary creations, such as popular poetry, *Romanceros* and the poetry of flamenco.<sup>73</sup>

The imagery used to refer to language reveals that the poet considers language as that which illuminates: “[palabra] Eres una cerilla para mí”, what is otherwise obscurity and void:

como ésa  
que enciendo por la noche y con la luz que vierte  
alcanzo a ir a la cama viendo un poco, como ésa;  
sin ti, sería tan duro llegar hasta la muerte. (98)

In the following stanza, the poetic voice’s bedroom and bed are used as metaphors of both the journey and the final point in the journey of life: “[palabra] cruzo contigo el dormitorio/ desde la puerta niña hasta la cama anciana” (1989: 98). Bedroom and bed are used with the same meaning as the image of the river leading to the sea, alluded to in the following verse, was for Jorge Manrique the metaphor for dying:

Gracias sean para ti, gracias sean, mi hormiga  
ahora que a la mitad de la alcoba va el río.  
Después, el mar; tú y yo ahogando la fatiga,

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<sup>73</sup> On 1 March 2007, Grande gave a conference in the *Instituto Cervantes* (London) on the “cancionero flamenco” in which he defended its often unacknowledged literary value.

alcanzando abrazados la fama del vacío. (1989: 98)

In Félix Grande's poetry reflections upon the subject of language tend to be positive and metaphoric. His poems, instead of exerting a demystifying critique of language, do celebrate language. It is obvious that for Grande the gift of language outweighs its imperfections. It is not that the poet cannot see the traumatic event at the origin of which the creation of language is situated—the progressive and painful separation of human beings from nature, that is, the abandonment of a paradisiacal pre-Oedipal state—but, rather, that he refuses to reject or criticize exactly what can be employed to ease and relieve trauma. In fact, the wound of the trauma to which he refers with various names, such as the scar (*cicatriz*), decay (*caries*) or simply the wound (*la herida*), and for which language serves the end of a healer, is a constant presence in his poetry. This wound is readable through and through Grande's work. And even if one cannot fully explain the wound verbally, still traumatic reality slips through language, facilitating the (partial and incomplete) access to the unknown. The following passage metaphorically describes the sickly pervasiveness of trauma:

Advirtió que tenía un hueco, una especie de alvéolo apócrifo y grandioso [...] conforme iba notando que el hueco se agrandaba [...] ese hueco vertiginoso que al parecer necesitaba ser una cueva bajo su piel o un centro palpitante en el fondo de sus ideas [...] pensaba ligeramente en ir a la casa de un psiquiatra, pero como esa cosa, esa caverna, le hacía pensar que era el universo lo que resultaba confuso, comprendía que la humildad a que lo reducía esa caries le vedaba la recuperación: [...] y el hueco seguía creciendo con una silenciosa y enigmática presencia [...] allí donde estaba, fuera donde

fuera, ya no cabía cómodamente [...] En ocasiones, por entre las palabras le emergían pedazos de ese hueco. (1975a: 11-12)

In a short story from *Parábolas* (1975) still another word is added to the lexicon of trauma: “momia”. The poet begs for “piedad para quien tiene una momia, porque la tengo, porque no logré ajusticiarla” (1975a: 71) and compassion for “los seres que tienen momia. Charlar con ellos, agradecerles su desgracia” (1975a: 72). It is an interesting story because it shows two things. On the one hand, the narrative voice’s libidinal attachment to the lost Object. In the following passage we find the narrative voice wishing to practice a coitus with the “thing” (an indefinite presence) that accompanies him everywhere and that is the cause of his “existencia insoportablemente confusa”. The narrative voice gives an overwhelming power to this entity, for he thinks that if he could symbolically understand what this shadow is by metaphorically loving this “thing”, as in the end happens, everything would become clear and coherent at once, the significance of the “thing” in his life, why it accompanied him everywhere, this impenetrable mystery, “la respuesta a toda mi existencia”, would be finally exposed, his “unity” finally restored. Perhaps the reference here to a female body, pleasure and the desire for unity and completeness makes it almost inevitable to think of the profound psychic longing to re-establish the sense of unity characterizing the pre-Symbolic order.<sup>74</sup>

Tenía yo la sensación, la sospecha de que, de haber sido posible vivir un coito con semejante cuerpo, con semejante infinitud profunda, antiquísima e inalterable, ello

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<sup>74</sup> See my analysis of “Como una inundación”, pp. 256-261.



hubiera significado quizá algo así como la organización de todas mis horas, como la unidad, el orden de todo mi destino, y, además, por medio de un acto gozoso. Hubiera significado algo así como la respuesta a toda mi existencia insoportablemente confusa. Porque, como ya he dicho, yo soy un hombre sencillo y aspiro a la coherencia de las cosas. (1975a: 61).

On the other hand, the passage gives us a useful insight of what is at stake in Grande's relationship with language. It is not only that language gives, in fact allows, contact with the traumatic wound—often it is a passive, melancholic and masochistic self-indulgence in the wound, although the passage above shows a *jouissant* symbolic transfiguration of injury—, language provides that sought-after coherence, by annulling separation and pursuing unity. Grande seeks a shelter in language, “una caverna de descanso” (111), a temporary halt, a truce from the devastating effects of continuing suffering. In fact, the verse calls for a comparison with animals in their shelters. A human being likes to “withdraw into his corner” and “it gives him pleasure to do so”, writes Bachelard (1994: 91). But in the following lines we learn that the “caverna de descanso” is a womb which demonstrates to what degree the erotic is interwoven with the “maternal” security language confers. Maternal, not only because it nurtures and protects, but, foremost, because it gives birth to the self:

y entonces  
se enrosca a un cuerpo de mujer  
y convierte en un gesto turbulento  
lo que mantiene al mundo

y busca en la matriz no un siempre venturoso  
sino un jamás enérgico,  
no un hijo sino una caverna de descanso,  
no un porvenir ilusionado  
sino el umbrío rincón para la fiera herida; (111)

### 3.2 Grande's "theory" of memory and forgetting

*Ese don que nos consiente tener reunida nuestra vida: la memoria*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

*Siento gratitud hacia los seres que me ayudaron a descubrir la grandeza de la memoria.*

(Grande, *Once artistas y un dios*)

*No creo honesto negar el pasado [...] usando para ello el desvergonzado procedimiento*

*del olvido*

(Grande, *Once artistas y un dios*)

Reyes Mate argues that Spanish is not a language for logos; Spanish is, he asserts, a language for memory ("the memory that confronts the forgetfulness of logos" [2001: 260]). By this he means that there has generally been a lack of philosophical thinking in Spanish. María Zambrano (1939) also made the same remark—that Spain has not generally been a country of philosophers. Reflecting on the relationship between poetry and philosophy, she states that it is within the realm of poetry that any genuine Spanish

thinking takes place. So, according to both philosophers, Spanish thinking has taken place less within the framework of logical categories, that is, in the mould of philosophy, than within the context of literary forms of “thought”.

By the same token the historian Sánchez González observes that:

[...] Aunque pueda parecer paradójico, los historiadores en general, y los españoles en particular, hemos reflexionado muy poco sobre la naturaleza y posibilidades de un concepto como el de la Memoria. (2004: 153)

According to Ignacio Sotelo, Spanish literature has recently been greatly concerned with memory, but the same cannot be said of literary criticism:

La “memoria” histórica ha ocupado una posición destacada en la novelística española [...] los ejemplos son tan abundantes que echamos de menos un libro que muestre las raíces profundas de la “memoria histórica” en la literatura de los últimos decenios. (2007: 16)

The quotations above are particularly revealing when it comes to the study of memory in Grande’s work. For, if we bear them in mind, we can happily assert that the work of Grande surely offers an insightful reflection on the mechanisms and dynamics of memory. Yet the visions on memory that spring from his work vary if we isolate his poetry from his prose. Whereas in prose Grande demonstrates an awareness of the subject of memory and develops his own coherent thoughts on the topic—his own “theory”, one might be tempted to venture—it is rather in his poetry where forms of traumatic memory manifest themselves more clearly. Put differently, Grande’s poetry shows a sick functioning of memory, insofar as it displays the workings of mechanisms closely linked

to trauma, such as obsessions, blocked memory, hallucinations, narcissistic identifications and melancholia. These differences may rely on the specificity of the “genre” (if it is one) of poetry in contraposition to the genre of the essay. Carmen Martín Gaité, for example, observes in her introduction to his work in verse that prose is the conduit to tell stories in a detached manner, “un vehículo de historias menos apegadas a la mía” (2001: 16). More significantly, it is also the particular nature of trauma that makes poetry especially prone to becoming more revelatory of a damaged memory, for it is in poetry that the breaches in cognitive thought characterizing trauma can be better staged. This is not to say that in Grande’s poetry the treatment of memory is exclusively traumatic, since we also find fitting sentences about the normal functioning of memory, and interesting observations about memory and ethics, as well as memory’s connections with language and identity. It needs saying that even if Grande’s poetical memory remains to a great extent unhealthy (although, paradoxically, traumatic recalling seeks a cure precisely in the act of remembering), the poetic voice never ceases to rate it highly.

I will mainly draw on the essayistic work *Memoria del flamenco* to show that Grande’s thinking of memory is original, in that he shied away from what were at the time common views. Grande’s way of understanding memory is largely opposed to the disillusioned vision shared by most of his contemporaries. His vision includes reflections on memory’s mechanisms and practices that have come to coincide with an important part of current research carried out by experts from different fields. His poetical intuitions

are relevant for their philosophical, cultural and ethical import, and clarify from the perspective of literature what is a highly theoretical topic.<sup>75</sup>

If *Memoria del flamenco* shows Grande's "theoretical" grasp on the practices (uses and abuses) of memory, this relentless belief in "good" memory and in the ways it can triumph over memory's more destructive aspects has culminated in the writing of his (2003) fictionalized autobiography, *La balada del abuelo Palancas*. Even if trauma admits a difficult (full) resolution, we have nevertheless to concede that Grande's novel is a remarkable attempt to narrate his life in ways that are not venomous or overtly self-destructive. Foremost, biographical and historical events are put into narrative form, which is already a step forward in working through trauma. In addition to this, all the mechanisms of a "good" memory are set in motion, to the point that perceptions of the past are radically different from the traumatic ways in which experience is treated and worked through (and even left unspoken) in his poetry. *La balada del abuelo Palancas* is seemingly a practical exercise, even an embodiment, of Grande's prescriptions for a good use of memory explicitly alluded to in *Memoria del flamenco*.

We need to take into account that Grande's latest work in verse is a collection of poems completed in 1984. This means that Grande has not published poetry for more than two decades. Twenty years are a considerable amount of time to work through trauma, and given the self-analytic skills the poet shows he is endowed with in his poetry, where

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<sup>75</sup> I am thinking, for instance, of Ricoeur's study of memory. What Grande has in common with Ricoeur's thought is, fundamentally, his believing in what Ricoeur calls "good" memory. Ricoeur states: "It is important, in my opinion, to approach the description of mnemonic phenomena from the standpoint of the capacities, of which they are the 'happy' realization [...] What in the final analysis, will justify taking this position in favor of 'good' memory is my conviction, which the remainder of this study will seek to establish, that we have no other resource, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself" (2006: 21).

he sets out on a quest through an abyss of inwardness, as will be seen, it comes as no surprise that in *La balada del abuelo Palancas Grande* attempts a reconciliation with his own memory (a difficult enterprise which his poetry challenges in any case) and with the memory of his historical circumstances.

When Grande stopped writing, the dictatorship had been over for some years and the Spanish transition into democracy was confidently established. However, this conscious exercise of memory in *La balada del abuelo Palancas* does not cancel the work of mourning carried out in his poetry. Neither does it mean that Grande's work of mourning has been completed. For, as we have seen in relation to the fashioning of the self, an author is able to create new sides to the self that nevertheless do not invalidate other dimensions which are far more problematic and less likely to be articulated through narrative means. This amounts to saying that *La balada del abuelo Palancas* is an extended part of his previous work.

As already pointed out, differences in the treatment of the problem of the past may be accounted for by the specific nature of the "genre" of the novel, as opposed to the particularities of poetry to which I referred in chapter II. Since in this thesis I set out to demonstrate the two distinguishable aspects of Grande's memory, its traumatic manifestations in poetry, on the one hand, and the poet's effort to make sense of the phenomenon in prose (especially in the paradigm of the essay), I claim that these two distinct modalities of memory are sufficiently demonstrated, first, in my exploration of his poetry, and, second, in *Memoria del flamenco. La balada del abuelo Palancas* would not add anything significantly different or new from what I show in my discussion of

*Memoria del flamenco*. Therefore, I will not dwell on it to discuss the good uses of memory which will be addressed in the following pages.

In *Memoria del flamenco* explicit and straightforward reflections on memory are conflated with patterns of recalling that unveil an underlying structure of memory. Grande states: “Si es cierto que este libro es un homenaje al flamenco no es menos cierto que es también, en un segundo plano, un homenaje a la memoria” (1999: 486). These reflections are particularly applied to the gypsies and to the Jews. In the preface to it, Caballero Bonald states that:

Se trata, en cierto modo, de un texto cuyo despliegue parece obedecer a una conducta fluvial: a medida que avanza en su curso se va engrosando –diversificando– con un singular acopio de afluencias. No pocas de ellas vienen de los yacimientos de la erudición, otras –abundantes también– provienen de un opulento manantial de intuiciones y contribuyen a enriquecer lo que pudo haber discurrido por un deficitario cauce emocional. (1999: 9)

Grande’s vision emerges from a variety of sources, which include poetic intuition. *Memoria del flamenco* is a book written by a poet with, to a great extent, poetical instinct or, to use Kristeva’s words, with *chora*.<sup>76</sup> There is also intellectual erudition in Grande’s analysis of memory, especially when he examines the cultural and historical remembering of minority ethnic groups. More interestingly, Grande’s observations stem, perhaps, from his own experience of the catastrophe of inner exile.

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<sup>76</sup> Kristeva defines “semiotic chora” as the “flow of jouissance into language” (1984: 79), which, according to Calvin Bedient means that “art utters what cannot be uttered: *instinct*” (1990: 807).

As his writing is essentially poetic, even when he writes in prose, the form that his thinking takes is, to a great degree, intuitive. Intuition is precisely what makes *Memoria del flamenco* a book between history and memory. The orthodox practice of history is counterbalanced here by the tacit knowledge of a form of representation that does not have to rely necessarily on a scientific methodology and, yet, is endowed with epistemological value. In the book we are presented with a form of knowledge that ranges from anthropology to art. And art bears its own kind of anthropological knowledge. Caballero Bonald draws a parallel between the flamenco song (a form of knowledge) and an ontological mode of becoming: “No hace falta decirlo: un modo de cantar define antropológicamente un modo de ser” (1999: 16). According to Derrida, too, the bearing witness of memory has to do not only with language, as it is also inextricably connected with music:

Bearing witness is not through and through and necessarily discursive. It is sometimes silent. It has to engage something of the body, which has no right to speak. We should not say, or believe, that bearing witness is entirely discursive, through and through a matter of language. (2005: 77)

Memory, then, is not only connected with words; it is also connected with the body as it is interwoven with music. Derrida uses the word “silent” in contraposition to “discursive”, so there is no need to understand silent as “no meaning”. Grande himself refers to the eloquence of silence. This is especially true of flamenco singing, a very physical singing where the so-called “ayeo”, that is, the inarticulate lamentation—almost a pitiful cry—along with its silent pauses as well as body gesticulation, are as meaningful



as the words themselves. Grande observes that the memory that inheres in the flamenco song is the “missing” link unifying history with the self:

Lo que en el cante anuda al ser y al tiempo histórico es esa forma de moral sin la cual el hombre no sería emocionante, el arte carecería de duración, los pueblos no tendrían proyecto: la memoria. [...] Las vivencias [...] ¿se han convertido ya en memoria en el interior de los cantes? (1999: 486)

The artistic lament springs from a primitive scream—a form of moral complaint—bonded to memory from the remotest origins of the self. Memory, inseparable from the ways of practicing it, defines an anthropological way of existence, that is, of making sense of the world.

Grande’s memory, as his own sense-making mechanism, is grounded not only on his own experiences but also supported by the memory of others, especially the collective memory of the gypsies as an ethnic group. Grande is a connoisseur of Andalusian gypsies’ customs and traditions and an expert on their practices of memory. In his poetry, Grande’s life experience comes to merge with their experience in dramatic questions, such as traumatic loss. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Grande’s first serious approximation to the subject of memory (*Memoria del flamenco*) took the form of a book that had the history of the Andalusian gypsies as protagonist, given the interest and intense communion he held with this minority. So, interestingly enough, he articulates his private memories through the cultural memory of this ethnic group. Perhaps, Grande found in the memory of flamenco an effective way to objectify and give a narrative context to his own painful remembrances, making the book a good example of how the

private and the collective are embedded in one another. *Memoria del flamenco* also refers to the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Grande justifies his including reflections on the Shoa in the book in terms of his own life:

Los individuos de mi generación hemos leído una gran cantidad de documentación sobre aquella barbarie antisemita. [...] El horror hizo que al pensar en judíos gaseados pensáramos en nosotros mismos; y a nosotros, no hay duda, nos pensamos como personas. Si el judío pudo haber sido el otro, ahora ya no lo era: ardía como hubiera ardido nuestro padre, se vaciaba de su singularidad y dejaba al desnudo a una persona como tú, incluso como yo. (1999: 444)

Even if Grande gives historical facts and dates, he does not refer to memory from the perspective of a professional historian, which he is not, or as an expert on memory-- although he laments that history hardly pays attention to that other form of historical knowledge that memory is—but, rather, through the analytical methodology he derives from his own living and understanding of memory. The first identifiable aspect of memory he highlights, which can also be found in the gypsies' use of memory, is precisely its being ingrained in the body. Memory, he observes, is a living organism for whose description we need images of the body. He employs corporeal metaphors, some of them borrowed from flamenco gypsies. Grande assures us that the last element to disappear among all the sensitive components attached to memory, the sense that remains when the others have almost disappeared, is the sense of touch. In order to support this, he cites Manolo Alcántara: “De los recuerdos, como de los naufragos, lo último que se ve son las manos” (cited in Grande 1999: 23).

Other images of the body that he identifies with memory are “veins” and “blood”:

[...] el latido de los años circulando en esta inmensa red de venas calendarias, en ese otro sistema circulatorio al que llamamos memoria. La memoria es también la verdad y la vida, otra manera de la sangre. (1999: 24)

For Grande memory engages with life. It is so powerful as to win over and outlive death itself: “la muerte tiene incluso más fuerza que los niños, pero menos que los recuerdos” (2003: 215).<sup>77</sup> As a consequence, illness comes along when memory fails us:

A veces la memoria empeora, y la emoción se vuelve anémica. En otras ocasiones nos falla la memoria, y uno se apoya contra la pared, sin fuerzas y perplejo como un enfermo. (1999: 24)

Upon this trait of memory, its being a living organism that can contract diseases, rests precisely one of Grande’s intuitive and yet accurate comprehensions of what memory is: a living entity which is therefore subject to constant change. Grande’s words are intended as a metaphor, yet his intuition is remarkably accurate. This analogy of memory being blood and veins reminds us of the bio-physiological constitution of memory. Some experts believe that memory, rather than a product of thinking, is literally a material place that can be located in the brain. For these “materialist” scientists, there is no such a thing as the mind. Brain is all there is (Ruiz-Vargas 2002).

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<sup>77</sup> A mighty memory is also the idea behind some of Alberti’s lines in “Retornos del amor en los balcones”, in which “retornos” manifest the evocative power of memory and the force with which it resuscitates the past: “Ha llegado ese tiempo en que los años/ las horas, los minutos, los segundos vividos/ se perfilan en ti, se llenan de nosotros,/ y se hace urgente, se hace necesario,/ para no verlos irse con la muerte,/ fijar en ellos nuestras más dichosas,/ sucesivas imágenes” (2006: 330).

Being a living organism, should memory be lacking, there are consequences for the body. We may become sick or, what is worse, become living corpses. This happens, according to the poet, when we attempt to escape, negate or avoid memory:

Hay quien, un día, escapando de su memoria, huyéndola, negándola, se da cuenta de pronto de que ha muerto, de que se ha convertido en un ser macilento, superfluo, vegetal: lo que llamamos, con precisión cruel, un cadáver viviente. (1999: 24)

Since Grande establishes an unavoidable link between memory and identity—a connection that contemporary research has widely acknowledged (see Middleton and Woods 2000)—no memory means the self’s annihilation, an “être-pour-la-mort” (Ricoeur 2007), death-in-life.

The capacity of memory to create identity resides in its ability to unify, to put together different elements and in so doing produce sense and meaning from scattered elements. In other words, it confers sense to the relationality that combines dispersed objects, therefore, turning them into proper “experience”. This is the characteristic of memory that justifies for Grande its fundamental role in his life. He finds in memory the same reassuring sense of uninterrupted only comparable to the perception of connectedness in nature. It comes as no surprise, then, that he uses metaphors taken from nature to express this illusion of seamless continuity provided by memory. He selects words such as “mies” and “sarmiento”, perhaps because for Grande nature is the first and ultimate memory, the book from which human beings have learnt to read. Here, again, we

confirm Grande's material attitude toward making sense of the world, also the world of the immaterial:<sup>78</sup>

Es importante nuestro trato con la memoria: ella es la tomiza que maniat a los haces de mies, es también la cadena que sujeta los perros de la vida, y el sarmiento que anuda a la gavilla que nos calentará las manos; ella es lo que reúne. (1999: 24)

Indeed. One of the central operations of memory is to unify. Memory selects and combines those elements so that meaning can be produced. This is not to say that memory does not include contradiction or is not fraught with inconsistencies. "Sense" and "identity" are terms that entail at least some unity and coherence but which, nevertheless, do not necessarily foreclose meaning or rule out change. Sense indicates that there has been a process of recognizing, selecting and associating, so that we can make sense of ourselves and the world, preventing our identity from going adrift. In this regard Grande reminds us that relinquishing memory means our own mutilation or dissolution into nothingness.

Grande's faithful attachment to memory—for him a moral issue—functions at his own emotional cost. Too much remembering—or rather the obsessive repetition of certain patterns of remembering—leads the poet to display a great deal of complacency with neurosis. But this will be analyzed at length in the final chapter. For the most part, in regard to Grande's "theory" of memory, oblivion means forgetting those elements that

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<sup>78</sup> I use the expression "material attitude" rather than "materialism" as the latter sometimes has a negative meaning.

have configured our public and inner lives and which we cannot do without paying a price:

Es cierto que en ocasiones no podemos del todo con nuestra vida entera; desearíamos abandonar en una plaza silenciosa una época particularmente perversa, perder por las calles años completos de demasiado barro, borrar sucesos testarudos con testarudo olvido. Pero quizá la vida es como un cuerpo: y separar alguna parte es simplemente una mutilación. (1999: 24)

In this quotation the adjective “silenciosa” accompanying “plaza” is not arbitrary or casual. Silence threatens when memory ceases to exist. In fact, Grande’s theory of memory is connected with his questioning of a deliberate and seemingly suicidal quest for silence. If, for many poets, poetry consisted in a purposeful pursuit of silence, this approach has gone mainly unused in Grande’s work. Not least in the manner of a literary technique or a thought-out plan. Grande’s poetry does not encourage silence but it contains silence. Silence as the theoretical premise behind poetic creation is in contrast with the kind of silence engendered by the poet’s inability to grasp something which is beyond expressibility. It is in Grande’s work a void or zone of indeterminacy. And it also points indirectly to the presence of a totalizing discourse that under the Franco regime stifled artistic creation. Seen in the light of the historical context of authoritarianism and terrorist nationalism, it is easier to understand the artist’s quest for his own voice and identity. The artist then becomes the voice of the Other, the non-place left for alterity.

Another discernible characteristic of Grande’s theory of memory implicit in his *Memoria del flamenco*, has to do with particular uses and practices of memory. In the first

pages of the book, Grande tells us about a man in conflict with his own memory, and embarks on a reflection to suggest that the way we remember is a question of will. In clear disagreement with the statement that our memories are imposed on us, as indomitable and untamed forces, Grande believes that one can choose to misuse and abuse memories or, conversely, learn how to make good use of them. Of the man in conflict with his memory, Grande writes that he possessed: “una memoria contrariada, a la defensiva, una memoria a la cual estaba agrediendo con sus provocaciones” (1999: 25). The ability to use memory for our own good is a gift, which is also linked to the concept of responsibility. Herein rest the ethical aspects of Grande’s theory of memory:

La memoria no es un regalo, no es una caricia del tiempo, no es invariablemente un bien: es un don y también un desafío al coraje, es un espejo de agua, es la palabra de honor que nuestra fidelidad le da a la vida. No siempre podemos cumplirla, y entonces nos sentimos iracundos, e incluso miserables. Y se nos desdibuja el rostro. (1999: 24)

Grande shows that memory cannot be thought beyond its uses, for it does not exist in abstract terms, except in a world of abstractions. Memory is ineluctably connected with practices of memory. It is not unconditionally good, he states, as the kindness or the harm of memory depends on its uses. To remind us of the different elements the practices of memory put into play, Grande brings forth the question of perception. By relating the act of remembering with that of perceiving, he suggests that the way we see things is, ultimately, our choice. He illustrates this view by showing how a pernicious use of memory, for which the man in conflict with his memory serves as an example, engenders violence and suffering:

Sus ojos no estaban furiosos, sino desesperados; imposible quizá saber de dónde le llegaba esa violencia estúpida y suicida; probablemente algún estorbo había en su vida, una desilusión, no sé, una desgracia: y una memoria contrariada, a la defensiva, una memoria a la cual estaba agrediendo con sus provocaciones y con su vino descompuesto; [...] qué habrá sido de aquel hombre patético; quizá le haya pegado un tiro alguien más desesperado que él, o acaso esté en la cárcel, o haya muerto en Vietnam, o exhiba o esconda una medalla militar, o ande pegando puñetazos sobre una mesa para humillar a sus subordinados. (1999: 24-25)

Grande is remembering here how anger interferes with memory—how emotions weigh on the selection and combination of individual memories—and in so doing he leads us to the ethics of the self: a violent and disturbed identity springs from a memory in conflict with itself. This, which serves for the individual, can be applied to any society or community where conflicting memories generate violence.

According to Kahneman (2006), the secret of happiness resides in memory, for which discovery he has recently gained a Nobel Prize.<sup>79</sup> He argues that memory is not a passive mechanism of retrieval—we actively reconstruct our memories:

Attualmente sono in favore di un modello ibrido, di una visione più complessa e integrata, che tenga conto sia dell'esperienza vissuta che del modo di archivarla, classificarla, riviverla e raccontar(ce)la. Ricordare, rivivere e narrare le nostre esperienze è per noi importante, anche se il loro vissuto originario era per noi diverso. (2006: 24)

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<sup>79</sup> In an interview conducted by an Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, Kahneman declared that: “È nel ricordo la vera natura della felicità” (2006: 31).



Such a reconstruction of memory (the archiving, classifying and way of narrating experience, according to Kahneman) needs to take place with the intervention of imagination. Richard Schoch, who has extensively researched the subject of happiness (2006), has come to the similar conclusion that the use of imagination brings happiness and that the former is a component of the Real: “imagination is the path to happiness. But imagination is less about making things up (which is fantasy) than about grasping truths that lie beyond rational comprehension”.

Grande reveals in his texts that, somehow, he was aware of the above, namely, that memory is not exactly imposed on us but, rather, that narrative memory has very much to do with ethical choices. According to him, a self-denying memory may well be equal to oblivion (“desmemoria”):

Resentidos o zalameros, hostiles o ceremoniosos, conmovedores o irritantes, unos simulando un heroísmo que con toda seguridad no tienen y que sin duda creen necesitar y otros apostrofando con un valor colérico y necio a cuanto se mueve junto a ellos, unos insultando a sus ausentes familiares, otros insultándose aplicadamente a sí mismos, unos agrediendo a quien se demora por mirarlos, otros asustándose de cualquier mirada inocente e incluso compasiva, cayendo al suelo con desinterés o incorporándose con exhausto orgullo, mostrando un iracundo puño u ocultando el rostro en las manos, vomitando pudorosamente detrás de las puertas de un coche u orinando con ostentación o con indiferencia en medio de una plaza; vociferantes, silenciosos y hasta, en ocasiones, gimiendo o cubiertos de lágrimas..., pero siempre llenos de un raro y turbio frío, acompañados o perseguidos por su exilio: solos. Muestran una derrota y a la vez una desmemoria. (1999: 25-26)

In the passage above Grande shows again that memory is linked to the ways we see; “see” in the sense of perceiving.<sup>80</sup> Memory constitutes in itself a kind of perceiving, for which description Grande also uses the metaphor of drinking wine. Wine, he observes, can intensify our emotions, annihilate them or it can numb our senses. These three distinct ways of drinking wine may be taken as symbolizing three different practices of memory which can be arguably and metaphorically applied to three distinguishable periods in the recent Spanish history. Two of them are periods of our recent past, a third one can be said to be at the dawn of a recently inaugurated period for Spanish society. The first practice of memory or, to use Grande’s metaphor, the first mode of drinking wine, consists in annulling memory. Of those who use memory (or drink wine) in order to forget, Grande observes:

Muestran una derrota y a la vez una desmemoria. Beben, ciertamente, para olvidar. Ya no pueden con todo, están profundamente fatigados o desilusionados o hartos y estrangulan a sus recuerdos con la mano del vino. En realidad quieren morir, o matar, y no pueden: matan y mueren con sordina; cubren su cabeza de olvido, cubren de olvido su eszaleado corazón. Beben un vino trágico. Un vino aislante, fronterizo, caído. Un vino en el fondo del cual hay ojos vacíos y bocas silenciosas y manos apagadas y palabras petrificadas y calendarios quietos: y unos cuantos siglos dormidos. Y, todavía, una lágrima. Una lágrima que ya empieza a secarse. (1999: 26)

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<sup>80</sup> Rafael Alberti, whose poetry presents similarities with that of Grande when it comes to the latter’s “theory” of memory, also relates a relinquishing of memory to losing the sense of sight. Alberti knows well that memory is a way of “seeing”.

Grande's metaphoric words need to be read for what they imply as well as for what they say metaphorically. The realm of signification gathered in by Grande's words expands here from his personal experience of those historical years to collective experience. Collectively, the necessity to forget was an urge to get rid of a painful past under the dictatorship, a willing strategy for survival. That survival is the driving force behind forgetting is well illustrated in the works not only of Grande but, also, of other poets such as Antonio Gamoneda and José Hierro. In Grande the need to forget assumes a reproachful tone, even if he recognizes that a state of utter desperation, mental exhaustion and disillusion may lead to willed forgetfulness ("desmemoria"). However, he argues, this is an unfortunate end for which memory should not be employed.

In "Por los barrios del mundo viene sonando un lento saxofón", and establishing a parallel between slavery and exploitation in America, the "old world" exploited white laborers and victims of war and deprivation, the poetic voice refers to the act of drinking wine in order to forget as a strategy for hiding desperation: "Blancos bebiendo el vino/ de la derrota disfrazada [...] blancos desconcertados [...] borrachos/ de vino y blanca injuriada" (1989: 178-179).

The second practice of memory indicated by Grande has also much to do with forgetfulness. Yet, it is a kind of forgetfulness that is no longer a strategy of surviving but, rather, a sense of numbness originating in what Vilarós (1998), in her study of post-Franco literature and culture, describes as a fracture produced in the text of the grand narrative of the Franco regime, which was brought to a halt in the years of the transition. Let us see how Grande metaphorically represents this use of memory by referring to a way of drinking wine which does not remember:

Hay un vino intermedio. No tiene relación con la memoria: no quiere asesinarla, no quiere acentuarla. Es un vino ruidoso, que ayuda a hablar, a reír, finalmente a dormir. Se toma en grupo, con abundancia y sin hacerle caso: no se cohabita con él, se le utiliza. Es el vino de las fiestas de fecha fija, es un vino excitante, veloz, sin imaginación. Junto a él hay sonidos de tenedores, músicas voluminosas de aparatos de radio, gritos de camareros o de anfitriones o invitados. (1999: 26)

Grande invokes above the atmosphere of a never-ending “fiesta” in which the years of the Spanish transition to democracy were imbued, as the phenomenon of the “movida” illustrates. He goes on to observe:

Es un vino que comparece [...] en los sábados que lograron eludir la desgracia de las horas vacías. No tiene relación con la memoria. A este vino no se lo bebe con desesperación, ni con rencor, ni con autopiedad; tampoco se lo bebe con parsimonia y corazón, con lenta plenitud, con inteligencia del mundo. Se lo bebe, quizá, entre baile y baile, con avidez casual, o con una alegría que no tiene conciencia de su propio milagro, una alegría municipal, útil, muy sana, no muy conmovedora. (1999: 26)

This use of memory that Grande describes in the passage above is illuminating of the “politics of memory” during the transition. Grande’s words “alegría que no tiene conciencia” indicate well the state of affairs at the time. Those were, undoubtedly, happy years in an anaesthetic fashion. What they lacked was, precisely, “inteligencia”, an intelligent way of employing memory. Instead, “desmemoria” was all there was.

According to Vilarós:

La movida es, a pesar del ruido que produce, un silencio especial: el silencio de un pasmo. De ahí la siguiente afirmación de Herminio Molero: «En la movida hay siempre un problema de vacío. Es inverosímil. Por donde tires te encuentras con la nada, con eslabones que ya no existen. Es la historia de un vacío. Todo estaba a punto de ser y no ha sido». (1998: 37)

Thus from the point of view of memory during the transition the big expected change did not occur. As Álvarez Fernández, citing Vázquez Montalbán, observes, the act of “desmemoria” could be taken for granted “para los hijos o nietos de los ganadores de la Guerra civil y evidentemente ganadores de la transición”, for whom “la condena del levantamiento militar es inadmisibile ya que sería como sacrificar la gallina de los huevos de oro que «les devolvió el poder para siempre»” (2007: 23). Yet, what it is more difficult to understand is that:

Si los franquistas niegan con su actitud cualquier responsabilidad en los crímenes cometidos, también la sociedad española en su conjunto se empeña en ignorarlos al enterrar en el olvido y la indiferencia a las víctimas de la España vencida. (Álvarez Fernández 2007: 30)

Thus for Grande neither the first nor the second use of memory described above should be the best employment of memory—perhaps the second is even less appropriate than the first—precisely because the two entail forgetfulness. Grande’s ethics of memory advocate a use of memory that is also a reflection on silence, as it discards oblivion preventing the memory of violence from falling into the nothingness of silence. Silence in this case is understood by the poet as a betrayal, a lack of loyalty to life. In relation to the

kind of wine to which Grande referred above and which can be identified with the transition years, he states:

Es un vino que no busca al olvido, pero que finalmente lo encuentra: en el sueño, en la fatiga, en el embotamiento, en la indiferencia de la repetición. Y ese olvido, aunque sin crispación, de algún modo también sustituye a la vida. De algún modo, la usurpa. De los días, de los hechos monótonos y repetidos, se desprende fantasmal, la ceniza del Universo. Este vino intermedio no reaviva el incendio de vivir. Sin vehemencia, sin hondura, modesto, el vino del presente carece incluso de lo que tiene aún el vino trágico: la lenta y solitaria lágrima que se enfría. (1999: 27)

Thus, the employment of memory proposed by Grande is one which has to do with preventing the “lenta y solitaria lágrima” from becoming petrified, in other words, it has to do with the opposite of forgetting, that is, with the healing power of memory: this employment is precisely mourning. Grande’s entire work, in fact, can be considered a continuous labour of mourning. He mourns in solitude and vehemently by willingly entering in his burning memory. This is suggested by the title of the closing poem belonging to *Las rubáiyátas*, “El vino a solas, la memoria ardiendo” (1989: 372). He keeps warm the cry of memory and history which in others becomes cold or dry through no invocation. What Grande learns from the way the gypsies live their collective memory or what he shares with them, is to immerse himself in the oceanic cry of memory, he lets himself be drenched in its ardent waters. And he learns to do this with delicacy, peacefully and “a palo seco”, that is, without the accompaniment of anaesthetic or pain-killers—and oblivion, he assures us, is the main pain-killer. Grande enters into the vast sea of suffering to become engulfed in pain, moreover, to be mastered by pain. In other

words, he invites us to confront the pain of loss. Yet this pain constitutes, paradoxically, a “dolor feliz” (1999: 27), since it is the only means for healing. Let us see how Grande describes this third and desirable way of drinking wine—that is, of remembering, of using memory—leading to mourning:

Entonces recordé otra lágrima. Muy caliente. Digna de ser vista, descrita, memorada, envidiada. Bebo un sorbo de vino y entro con cierta vehemencia despaciosa en la memoria de una madrugada de cante. Fue la noche del 29 de agosto de 1969 [...] Cierro los ojos y veo de manera muy nítida el gesto parsimonioso y absoluto con que Manolo Caracol toma sorbos de vino. Se le juntan las letras de fandango en la boca, las historias nefastas o brutalmente solidarias que cuentan esas letras con una escandalosa sencillez, esas letras misteriosas y reventonas como la barriga de las embarazadas. Caracol nos mira sin vernos, cabecea para recordar, toma su necesario sorbo y alarga el vaso silenciosamente para que alguien le ponga otra cinta de vino, manotea con tensa suavidad, desvariado, escuchando con bravura los fandangos de Juan de la Vara que Camarón edifica ladrillo a ladrillo, o levantando él mismo en una mezcla de Gaudí y Dostoievski edificios inverosímiles en donde la desgracia y la caridad se juntan con una voz destrozada y eterna para protestar por ese dolor como jamás tal vez ningún ser quizá de la Tierra lo hizo con tanto corazón sin embargo. (1999: 27-28)

Wine, language and voice are united here to recall an ancient pain and by so doing the poet carries out an act of condemnation or protest. The act of mourning entails a process of rendering suffering and the lost object into metaphorical meaning, it sublimates it into symbolic activity, and the joy and relief liberated in this process become the recompense of mourning, the “dolor feliz”. For Grande this process is a

process of consolation and solace that lies at the heart of words and in their rhythmic sound: “que vive palpitante en el fondo de las palabras y en los sonidos de la rima” (2003: 183). Mourning in itself does not guarantee the disappearance of trauma, but it provides the path to work through it. Hence trauma is not simply re-lived in the act of mourning because the reliving of trauma would mean its endless and unendurable repetition. Instead, mourning implies that the survivor is aware that something overwhelming has impacted on him or her and owing to this recognition the survivor can begin to transform traumatic memory into a narrative pattern. Trauma tells its own story, which signifies that it cannot be easily identified or its origin found in a specific event or sets of events. When the gypsies sing and remember their millenarian suffering, they are certainly remembering certain conditions that they were forced to suffer. Yet, most of all, what they remember is the act of suffering itself, a suffering that has become the ultimate condition determining their ethnicity. It is, as María Teresa León puts it in *Memoria de la melancolía* when she writes about flamenco singing, suffering without a specific time or location: “fuera del tiempo, en la época del dolor del alma” (1989: 194). Hence when they sing they refer to this suffering very often without attributing it to anything in particular. They remember just the state of being in pain, precisely because it has become part of them, flesh and spirit. The suffering of the flamenco gypsies does not always name its cause; it is the story of a void, it exists in its own right. It has been objectified, like trauma is objectified in a gap, the unnameable thing. Paradoxically, this unnameable thing needs no justification nor corroboration nor explanation. Bearing witness to one’s own traumatic experience that trauma involves, is not longing for historical verification, but human empathy and compassion—“caridad”, “misericordia”—(Grande 1999: 28). It does



not vindicate or reclaim. It does not expect to produce epistemological knowledge, although the truth it brings out is real and consists in our recognition, that is, our bearing witness to the survivor's bearing witness that the suffering constitutes its own truth and carries its own legitimization.

When Grande tells us that Manolo Caracol is singing and remembering he refers to his singing as “documento”, that is, a documental proof:

Nada de lo que ocurra o se diga en este instante en esa habitación será mentira [...]

Aquí no se miente. En uno de esos gritos, en uno de esos documentos con que Caracol hoza en el origen del dolor o del amor como hoza un animal sediento por entre las ausencias del barro, oigo una voz llena de tiemblo que susurra *Es un Dios*. Miro a Quiñones: con la camisa abierta para escuchar con todo el pecho, tiene lágrimas en la cara y se tapa la boca con la mano. Con la otra mano buscaba, tanteando en la mesa, un vaso misericordioso. (1999: 28)

Grande is well aware of the temporal dimension of the pain to which Caracol is bearing witness and he, moreover, by listening, becomes involved in the process of testifying, a process in which he is an empathetic testifier—every time Grande remembers the scene, he becomes a witness. Yet the objectification of pain makes it eternal. Grande's further remarks on Caracol show this point:

Han pasado unos años y veo esas lágrimas y esa noche sonando por entre mis recuerdos. Caracol no era un dios. Era uno de los más trágicos artistas que jamás haya dado el cante flamenco, y era una tensión ya casi de metal por el afán de unir la vida entera con el tiempo entero, y era nosotros participando de esa tensión que tiene cara de

reloj parado e infinito, y era mucha memoria ocupada en el laborioso destino de reunir a la vida, y era un vino profundo ocupado en el laborioso destino de reunir los caballos de la memoria. Vino tentacular, lleno de clemencia, tremante como la de un monstruo dormido, vino sabio que conoce la inmensa solidaridad que une a las horas más apartadas y las congrega. Vino profundo como el amor, la música, el lenguaje. (1999: 28)

Here, once more, the literal reference of the text is transmuted into a figurative and metaphorical rendering of the scene. Wine, memory, language and singing become interwoven and reclaim one another. Wine assumes the valence of memory, its emotional force and significance. Thus wine acquires the attributes Grande associates with the use of memory he defends: memory as an overreaching force (“tentacular”), merciful and wise (“lleno de clemencia”, “vino sabio”) that puts the pieces of life together (“era mucha memoria ocupada en el laborioso destino de reunir a la vida”), by making the remotest times come back and gather together (“vino sabio que conoce la inmensa solidaridad que une a las horas más apartadas y las congrega”). Wine and memory are interconnected, wine as an intensifier of emotions—where memories are encoded; also, as the social rite of solidarity, understood as the gathering together to show empathy for one another, wine is made a symbol to remind us of the common memory of Humanity. In the poetic world of Grande these are the ways of building memorials of trauma.

Wine is the unifier of memory, with regard to which let me pause on the image of the horses of memory (“los caballos de la memoria”). Elias Canetti observes of the horse: “Siempre vivió en manadas y estas manadas estaban acostumbradas a *huir en conjunto* [...] El hombre, que se apoderó del caballo, constituye una nueva unidad con él [...] El

caballo comprende los impulsos de voluntad del jinete y los obedece” (1999: 312-313). Grande seems to use the symbol of the horse in the same way as described by Canetti, namely, as if the pieces of a life were in stampede, in danger of dispersion, and memory served to reunite and gather them. This is similar to Grande’s use, further on, of the expression “[memory is] la cadena que sujeta los perros de la vida” and, also, parallel to the use of the words “tomiza” (rope) and “sarmiento” (“vine shoot”) to symbolize what memory effects, namely, memory ties up, holds, knots, that is, memory reunites. And what does memory reunite and join together? Here, again, we find Grande’s use of a meta-language to refer to memory. He refers ultimately to life but uses metaphors taken from the organic world of nature: “gavilla” (sheaf), “mies” (ripe grain), that is, “piles” or grains, things that are separated. This desire to reunite in piles is, according to Canetti, a symbol that has stayed with human beings as a reminder of its surviving nature, and a trace of the times when human beings were harvesters:

El hombre ha reunido en un mismo grupo todos los montones que tienen precio para él. La unidad del montón que está constituido de frutas o granos es el resultado de una actividad. Muchas manos estuvieron ocupadas en su cosecha o recolección [...] los hombres celebran su alegría sobre los montones que han logrado [...] representan el esfuerzo rítmico de muchos. (1999: 83-85)

This anthropological observation about a more primitive interaction between man and nature shows how the task of piling up grains, ingrained in our adapting brains for survival, is also reproduced or has direct implications for the way human beings learnt to accumulate symbolical objects and created language and culture. It is precisely this

accumulative and unifying trait of the nature of human beings that for Grande constitutes the foundational grounds of memory. It can be clearly seen, then, that the etymological meaning of “to recollect” comes from “to collect”, that is, to gather together, to assemble. Thus memory is opposed to the dispersing force of temporality.

Ricoeur has observed that temporality is linked to three principles: “dissolution”, “agony” and “banishment”, whereas memory is endowed with the symbolism of eternity, “in the figures of recollection, living fullness, being at home, enlight” (1984: 28).

According to Ricoeur:

To temporality as “dissolution” are linked the images of devastation, of swooning, of gradually sinking, of unfulfilled aim, of dispersal, of alteration, and of extreme indigence; to temporality as “agony” are related images of deathwatch, of sickness and frailty, of civil warfare, of tearful captivity, of aging and of sterility; temporality as “banishment” includes the images of tribulation, exile, vulnerability, wandering, nostalgia and vain desire [...] There is not one of these four principal images or of their variants that does not receive the strength of its meaning *a contrario* in relation to the opposing symbolism of eternity. (1984: 28)

Thus the finite comes with sorrow, in opposition to the celebration of eternity (1984: 28). Grande seems to know that things are eternal in memory and hence his celebration of it. Yet, when memory is not able to recollect, banishment and its variants is all there seems to be. Hence a great part of Grande’s poetry can be seen as a reflection upon the radically threatening possibility of the inability to remember, which will be addressed in the second part of this thesis.

All the metaphorical references to different elements—wine, music, nature, language—point to a semi-implicit and intuitive knowledge of memory: they themselves embody memory and constitute the medium through which it is invoked, drawn and depicted. They form, ultimately, the condition of the possibility for mourning. Grande, like few other poets of his time, understood the remote origins of memory and, perhaps more fundamentally, the central role of memory in the healing of trauma.

Along with admitting the re-elaborations of the self carried out by memory, Grande remains faithful to the act of remembering. Grande chooses memory where forgetting could replace it, sometimes at his own emotional cost. He knows this well, for in a comment on César Vallejo's poetry he claims Vallejo died from pain because he was unable to forget: "Vallejo, el memoriado de dolores" (1986: 15). This fidelity to memory is not only faithfulness to one's own identity or to certain ideas or lived experiences, as the poet suggests in the closing line of "No echas angustia a la desgracia": "Defiende tus antiguas verdades para no ser un muerto" (132-133); it is fundamentally an ethical approach to human life. For without memory, he wonders, what can be left of humanity, as poems such as "No echas angustia a la desgracia" illustrate.

In Grande's obstinacy with memory can be seen a stubborn act for survival, justifiable on the grounds that memory guarantees an identity to the self, despite its being subjected to devious practices, and regardless of its emotional cost. It avoids the dissolution of the self into nothingness and guarantees its stability, even if it is a precarious one. Memory keeps depression at bay, no matter the attachment to sufferance. Keeping memory alive is an ethical imperative, especially when the memories that need

to be protected form part of the integrity of our own self. It is a form of obsession that attempts to give trauma a place, as will be seen in the following chapter.

There is still a fourth justification Grande uses to defend remembering at the expense of the benefits of forgetting, which is pleasure. There is no pleasure without memory. The destruction or underestimation of memory would signify the pernicious disappearance of gratification and delight. Memory has the ability to turn pain into pleasure. As Dostoyevsky, an admittedly great influence on Grande's work, has one of his characters say about another suffering character, Katerina Ivanovna: "[memories] are all that remain to her now [...] I'm glad, for even though it's only in her imaginings, she's able to perceive herself as having once been happy" (2003: 21). The imaginative component of memory, as Kahneman and Schoch remind us, allows for a reconstruction of past events in ways which are beneficial to one's own current interests. Memory can then have the effect of a therapeutic catharsis.

## 4. Trauma in the poetry of Félix Grande

### 4.1 The poetic voice's impossible witnessing

*They cite poets as witnesses*

(Plato, *Republic*)

*¿Quién podrá desdecir lo inexpresado?*

(Carlos Marzal, *Ánima mía*)

*Intentas ajustar cuentas con tu pasado para dejar en paz a un presente que no acaba de*

*cuajar, del que está brotando a borbotones sangre, herida*

*operación imposible dado el estado general del mundo*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

This chapter will analyse some distinguishable aspects in which trauma manifests itself in the poetry of Grande. It will deal with the ways in which a series of conditions akin to this psychic pathology are constantly and obliquely conjured up. In making sense of the world the poetic voice uses recurrent patterns of traumatic recalling which will be explored in the following sections. I will look at how the poetic self addresses the problem of conferring meaning to unresolved experiences through its employment of a specific terminology and certain symbolic representations. If trauma could be regarded as a theme, which it is not, being rather a structure of writing and a sense-making memory mechanism, one could say that trauma is the main theme of Grande's work.

The poems this thesis studies attempt to articulate unfinished experiences through their varied depictions of psychic “objects” which hold a remarkable resemblance to the phenomenon of trauma. These unarticulated experiences, whose latency is rather clear, are significantly grounded on silence. In “Lentos como inmortales” from *Cuaderno de Lovaina (Inéditos de Horacio Martín)*, a collection which has not been dated, the poetic self writes:

Hay trozos de ti mismo  
ocultos en ti mismo Carcomas  
hechas de tu propia materia  
Callan mientras trabajas  
callan mientras te engranas  
sin pasión en la historia  
Pero luego se agitan  
reaparecen durante  
tu pesadumbre o tu fatiga o tu asco. (378)

The first striking feature of this opening stanza is the poetic self’s use of a set of terms which can be applied to trauma, since they resemble common mechanisms of traumatic recalling. What these words describe is the conditions of powerlessness over overwhelming psychic objects and the impossibility of their location within certain



experiences. Or they refer to an utter inability to name them as experience.<sup>81</sup> The inability to escape them is as overbearing as their being hidden and belated. Words such as “trozos de ti mismo [...] Carcomas”, “ocultos”, “callan”, “luego se agitan reaparecen” indicate a state of the self linked to traumatic unnameability as well as denoting the latency and (semi or un) consciousness of trauma. There is even a line in “Como el nombre de un dios” (270-271) from *Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche* that “beautifully” describes trauma: “agresión antigua, invisible, monocorde”:

que me convierte en mi enemigo, que me cubre el camino de nieve alta. Que desencadena una tormenta de paredes alrededor de mí. [...]

Veo un túnel oscuro detrás, delante, arriba, a mis costados, a mis pies. (270)

These forms, which receive the general designation of “trozos”, are inconcrete and undetermined objects, as are the psychic forces metaphorically rendered into an indefinite aggression and a tunnel in the lines above. They are defined as an unidentifiable and shapeless encircling line (“recinto sin forma”) which is sinister and unintelligible—all of which denotes an inexpressible experience. Furthermore, haunting this encircling line (“deambulan en redondo”) there are silent and phantasmagorical figures. All this psychic material is perceived of by the poetic voice as an inheritance (“tu propia y sola herencia”) which nevertheless is a threatening punishment and an unnameable legacy: “Oh materia materia qué ominoso castigo/ tu propia ceremonia innombrable” (377).

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<sup>81</sup> When referring to similar psychic forces, the Grandian lexicon is very telling: “me sobrepasa”, “es más fuerte que yo”, “es gigantesco y despiadado”, “y mudo” (1975a: 15). They all account for an experience which turns the self upside down and is undescribably upsetting.

Their poison consists in their inhabiting the poetic self as though they were woodworms (“carcomas”) devouring the self and causing its premature aging and its becoming an increasing void (“oquedad”). In fact, they are said in the poem to accelerate death. These indeterminate psychic objects are pieces of the self which have been torn apart from the past, remnants that behave as if they had acquired a life of their own. They are therefore unmodifiable (“Pero cómo modificar/ cuanto ya no te pertenece/ Ahora y ayer ya no caminan juntos”, 379), and re-appear belatedly as suggested in “Pregón”, a poem whose main theme is loss: “para historias/ atrasadas, la tuya” (43).

In their inscrutability and impenetrability these conditions surrounding the poetic voice represent death. The aporia of mourning loss and death consists in the impossibility of a complete interiorization of the lost Object. This leads to the paradox of having to incorporate alterity within us, knowing that alterity is other than us. Thus, any attempt at interiorization is doomed to be reduced to spectral images, that is, ghosts: “Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same [...] the completely other, dead, living in me” (Derrida 2001b: 41-42). They are nondiscursive formations that can be taken as unfathomable regions into which the poetic voice nevertheless inquires. In this respect the problem of recognition can be understood as unmasterable interiorization. Yet the poetic self does not seem to gather any doubts as to the constitutive character of these emotional impressions. They have been interiorized, introjected as belonging to its own: “Son tú De ti”. And here an historical, external, cause is even suggested: “Vienen de un viejo ayer / aterrador de cicatrices” (378); “te digo que con [...] este temor tendré que deambular/ hasta que muera” (455). The poetic voice affirms: “pero tengo que volver a volver” (456), as if it were aware of its inability to change that which is an integral part of itself, the alterity that

death has introjected and which never dies, as the title “Lentos como inmortales” suggests.

Perhaps there is no better metaphor to convey the poetic voice’s struggle than the concept of “cancer”. If we were to understand the past as presence in the body, these menacing fragments of the self—bits of the past that have become part of the self—would constitute a sort of autonomous alien intruders. In fact, in the poem the past is somehow somaticized, as both the use of the word “entrañas” and the “hearing” of voices suggest:

Vienen de un viejo ayer  
aterrador de cicatrices  
[...]  
Y a veces cuando cierras  
ese cuaderno infame en donde  
como a una mariposa podrida  
has pinchado una noche  
o un amor o un fracaso, ellos avanzan  
ellos los vengadores sobrevienen  
pululan y dan golpes  
en las entrañas —tú— que los apresan  
y con voces casi inaudibles  
pavorosas y resurrectas  
te llaman, te llaman, te llaman. (379)

The poetic voice does not know the origin or the meaning of these enigmatic presences partaking of life, just as in a similar vein cancerous cells begin to reproduce without a purpose. They belong to the “misterioso tejido de la vida, en el fondo del fondo, en la/ trama/ del laberinto” (455), as it is put in “Luz lejana de la cabaña” from the collection *La noria*. “Laberinto” is another specific term used by the voice in the poem to convey a reality that he cannot escape.

The somatization of psychic trauma is also named through the use of vocabulary which points to the aftermath of a catastrophic accident: “herida”, “cicatriz”, “maraña”, “caries”, “frío”, even “monstruo”, “costra” as in the line “velarse a gritos la costra de la infancia adolescente” of *El ojo enorme de tu sepultura* (1989: 32); in “Luz lejana de la cabaña”: “Por el espanto y la caries y el frío vine subiendo tramo a tramo,/ ya no encontraba un solo mueble de paz en la casa de mi/ memoria” (455); in “Pomada de llanto”: “en la oscura maraña/ que forman mis raíces y mi historia y mi entraña,” (457); in “Nocturno”: “los siglos acuden al agujero del invierno/ como hojas descosidas” (453). On occasions the poetic self names the catastrophe itself, as in “Ni cicatriz siquiera”: “Y nada tengo yo más que mis sienes/ abarrotadas de devastaciones” (440). Other times these enigmatic creatures manifest themselves as voices that tell “shadowy” things of the poetic voice:

y caminan por la espalda del tiempo  
resonando a pasado y a renuncia  
y de un modo remoto dicen  
cosas de mí de sombra embadurnadas. (307)

Even if at the level of the formal the extensive use of blank verse throughout Grande's poetry may indicate an attempt to elaborate trauma through a narrative style, this writing trauma is beset with processes of condensation and displacement. The earlier process points to what remains concealed within a certain image or a given structure of thought. The latter denotes that an emotion, originally connected with an object or person, has been transferred to another object. Both processes are characterized by an excess or surplus of meaning and both have much to do with the formal side of writing. In the several close reading of selected poems, attention will be paid to condensation, displacement, violations of grammatical rules, variations of the same obsessions, surplus of sense, inflexibility masked as excess—what Bataille (1985) has called “the economy of excess”—and hyperbole, as ways of approaching an unlocatable excess that is the ultimate object of address in Grande's poetry.<sup>82</sup> Such an excess, as will be seen, is embedded in Grande's concerns with and poetic exploration of psychic illness.

Finally, although I shall focus on Grande's poetry in this chapter, trauma is not absent in other genres. Grande's prose is full of mentions of medicine (often psychiatry) and disorderly figures such as the different narrative voices in the short stories of *Lugar siniestro este mundo, caballeros*, whose neurotic characters struggle with muteness or are dragged down by obscure psychic powers.

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<sup>82</sup> Hyperbole is the main figure characterizing all Grande's expressive strategies. According to LaCapra, “trauma registers in hyperbole in a manner that is avoided or repressed in a complacent reasonableness or bland objectivism” (2001: xi).

## 4.2 The losses behind silence, guilt and hyperbolic pain

*Tú volverás a la miseria. Tú y la miseria  
tenéis un pacto de aniquilación.*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

*He querido expresarme.*

*Toda mi vida he querido expresarme.*

*No tengo otro destino, otro afán, otra ley.*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

*Quería decirlo todo. Es imposible. La mayor parte de las cosas se escurren  
calladamente hacia la muerte.*

(Grande cites Amos Oz, *Sobre el amor y la separación*)

*The place of a survivor is unlocatable. [...] If such a place were ever located,  
[...] the speech to be held or the word to be kept there would remain impossible.*

(Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*)

We know that loss lies where there is a remnant: “loss is inseparable from what remains” (Eng and Kazanjian 2003: 2). Loss, then, can be understood as death that is nevertheless not final, in that something always survives (a remnant, a trace, a memory of

what it was, even if it is only a silence). As Butler (2003: 468) has pointed out, this survival of the past in its remnants animates the thought about the past but does not recuperate it. In Grande's work pain, silence and an overwhelming sense of guilt constitute the traces of past losses which, nevertheless, they cannot replace. The threatening anxiety attached to feelings of guilt or responsibility for this loss becomes an emotional burden haunting the poems. Guilt has been studied in relation to the survivors of the Holocaust. Primo Levi's entire *oeuvre* is, for instance, a good example of sense of guilt attached to surviving catastrophe.

Life is experienced as the penance imposed by an offence, as though loss had been the result of a personal sin. The poem "Visita" (34) from the collection *Taranto* works as a metaphor for a sense of guilt engulfing the poetic voice. Here, the symbolically-charged objects are photographs representing a neglected past to which little attention has been paid. The word "Visita" already indicates a memorialisation of the past or a ritual, as when one establishes for oneself the need to visit regularly the tomb of a loved one. The exercise of memory contained in this poem is a painful one, for memory emerges as an obligation, almost as a whip that arouses conscience. The sense of guilt is contained in expressions that suggest that the poetic voice is accused and charged with metaphoric imprisonment. The crime committed consists in recognizing the danger of the disavowal of memory, a moral indictment to be commuted for the same pain: the poetic voice's abandonment to oblivion.

In fact, *Taranto* is a book structured around the axis of haunting familiar links and it is traversed by a clear sense of guilt. It does not matter that this work was engendered by Grande's admiration for and a wish to imitate Vallejo's style, for in this collection Vallejo

is treated as part of the family and called a “brother”. Curiously enough, the poetic voice—a mature, grown up voice one surmises—addresses an Other, identifiable as the child that this adult once was, naming it with the affectionate diminutive “Felixín”. The way this child Other is treated in the poem “Hermano germinal” accounts for the psychological renderings of the poetic self throughout Grande’s work, for the key to the problematic of trauma seems to rest upon this life phase, where the seed of future neuroses is planted. The premature death of a baby sister described in “Gemela temprana” shows well how the poetic voice struggles to accept survival.

All Grande’s collections touch upon the subject of loss, although the latter is posed in different recognizable fashions in each of them. *Las piedras* can be seen as a work in which absence is metamorphosed into a philosophy of time. In *Música amenazada* there is a search for metaphorical ways of fleeing the passage of time, and the devastation it creates in the psychological sphere of individuals and also in whole communities.

*Taranto* constitutes an elegy to the symbolical loss of Vallejo and at the same time is a funeral song to structural losses (the ones caused by the course of time) and historical deaths suffered in childhood as well as biographical losses transformed into collective suffering.<sup>83</sup> Grande’s work is also replete with references to lack, material poverty, and spiritual misery.

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<sup>83</sup> According to LaCapra, this confusion is proper to traumatic and post-traumatic states: “To blur the distinction between, or to conflate, absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the post-traumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling. The very conflation attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past, whose ghosts and shrouds resist distinctions (such as that between absence and loss). Indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what



Loss holds a difficult relationship between that which is already gone, dead, or perhaps never was (an abstract idea, a cherished ideal) and that which remains. So the presence of loss can only be visible or intuited from its remnants to which there is a recurrent reference through a very specific Grandian lexicon: ruins (“ruinas”), piedras (“las piedras de mi arqueología” and “cascotes ahogados en musgo” in “No echas angustia a la desgracia”), embers (“brasas”), etc.:

Si ahora, con el concurso de las brasas  
que no pude eludir y vinieron conmigo  
en forma de nostalgia y de vergüenza,  
escribiese un poema de pérdida y de amor  
que viviera más allá de mi muerte. (355)

The experience of loss, whose nature remains unknown to the poetic voice and therefore inexpressible, leaves the poetic self torn apart into pieces while at the same time it painstakingly attempts to bring these ruins or remnants together, in order to produce through words something coherent and eternal.

In “Compañía” from *Las piedras*, Grande writes: “el yugo de mi vida perdida, en donde empieza/ un abismo nocturno de pasos y de voces” (61). In these lines it is affirmed that the whole life is lost and that where loss exists an abyss begins. This is in accordance with Kristeva’s observation that “any loss entails the loss of my being—and of being itself” (1989: 93).

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happened to one in the past but realize one is living in the here and now with future possibilities” (2001: 46).

To build upon ruins—to attempt to construct coherence from traces—consists in the symbolic task of making loss never complete and insurmountable, that is, in somehow not succumbing to the death drive. Yet in reality the poetic self's stance toward the remnants of loss is ambivalent. Remnants of loss are either cherished and turn into the haunting presence of ceaseless pain, a sensory memory that puts into play the acting out of trauma; or, other times, these ruins of loss constitute the remnants through which the poetic voice works through loss, that is, its quest to overcome silence.

However, just as happens in a visit to an archeological museum, where we see remains testifying to past existence, Grande's remnants of loss stand in place of a gap left by "something" that needs to be reconstructed in narrative terms. And in this failure of producing meaning the poetic self's difficulties in working through trauma can be seen. Loss is informed by symbolic figurations that in their attempt to overcome it end up instead replacing or re-enacting the unrepresentability of loss, and so become figures of silence. And they constitute figures of silence because these remnants are to a great extent kept intact by compulsive repetition, causing silence to take the disguises that the lost Object adopts. Just as emotional pain and an overwhelming sense of guilt may be masks of loss, we find recurrent images that convey both the ideas of inextricability and inaccessibility associated with traumatic loss. Terms such as "noria" or "círculo" or "cerco" symbolize through their remitting to the notion of circularity, trauma's cyclic condition, as well as incapability, inability or even unwillingness to reach an "outside" of them, in order to achieve some knowledge. All of which underpins an ambivalent relation to mourning as the poetic voice longs to feel "extraviado en las galerías de mi alma" (13). In "Guarida" it even gives up on mourning: "hace tiempo que cede al cerco/ llamándose

cobarde” (153). At the same time, they point to a lack, to an inevitable absence: “toda ausencia es inexorable” (354).

There is no overcoming, that is, the impossibility to find an exit to it, a path of explanation or a way of substitution. Thus in some sense there is resistance or refusal to symbolic figuration to survive loss. By the term “survive” I mean, with Poucel, “successfully overcoming, through poetic creation, the silence that follows death” (2006: 183).

The poetic voice situates the beginning of its creativity in an early loss. In “Pregón” (*Taranto*), it states:

He aquí un pregonero  
que se hizo tal por pura pérdida  
y, particularmente, vocea lo suyo  
sin cansarse, al parecer, y que nadie ha visto. (43)

In *Taranto* the origin of loss is placed in childhood and, more specifically, in the death of a loved one, as the poem “Gemela temprana” illustrates:

Con esta voz de luto  
adónde iré que no me miren negro.  
Infancia sola y triste, tú has culpado  
mi vida [...]  
Hermana de tres años, si no hubieras  
tan pronto y absolutamente muerto

acaso no me hubiera puesto solo  
Te fuiste tanto, mi estupor fue tanto,  
mi desengaño tanto, que ahora tengo  
mi tanta vida silenciosa en luto,  
que ya es vida enlutada mi silencio.  
[...] no es tu destino  
parte del mío? no eres mi comienzo? (40)

Silence takes shape in the early stages of life. It was then that something irretrievably lost grew into a woodworm which was progressively to devour the life drive and vital energy of the poetic self. In “En este poema” of *Cuaderno de Lovaina* it is asserted: “yo escucho la carcoma en mi juventud” (380). This premature loss (the death of a loved one and possibly an ideal) has silenced the poetic voice’s life, turning it into an almost dead (“casi como un muerto”, 40).

There is also an overt political dimension to the representation of silence in Grande’s poetry that should not be overlooked. It is linked to state violence and the impossibility of speech:

Mientras asimilaba aquellos versos súbitos y calientes, ateridos y fraternales, supe que Carlitos y yo, aquella tarde, hace un cuarto de siglo, habíamos comenzado a derrotar a la dictadura franquista. (2001: 91)

Silence also comes to be represented overwhelmingly as a kind of prison or cage or as that which leads to a prison-like state (“Jaulas está pariendo este silencio”, 352).

Silence as a prison-like state does not necessarily have to be metaphorical. It may well be literal. Grande has described on several occasions the agony suffered during endless nights that prevented him from falling asleep, as he feared that the regime's police could turn up and seize him or any member of his family. Inquisitorial and arbitrary accusations formed part of individuals' everyday lives. This prison-like state that made speech impossible shares the same connotations of isolation, fear and isolation to which, according to José Ignacio Álvarez-Fernández (2007), prisoners were subjected to under Franco's regime.

Again, here we find an experience of silence that distances itself from an idea of silence as illuminating epiphany or the means for producing light. Grande associates it with a shadow: "Como una sombra he de callar" (352). Note the nuance of imposition or lack of choice in the use of the verb "to have". It is then inevitable to place the latter words within the context of the "prohibición de saber" (Susó de Toro 2006) or the equally telling "No se puede decir" in regard to the imposed silence under Franco's regime (Manuel Rivas 2008). Note how symbolically close to the writers' statements above are Grande's following lines:

Lo que siento, Lejana,

nadie y nada en el mundo

logrará persuadirme

de que es bastardo,

de que no ilumina.

Y sin embargo no puedo decirlo. (352)

It is significantly ambiguous that the verb used in the last cited line is “no puedo”. Is this “being unable to speak” an imposition coming from state violence or is it, rather, the inability to speak attached to trauma? Be that as it may, what seems likely is the presence of two kinds of different but interwoven silences: the loss of speech due to political circumstances, traumatizing in itself, and the one associated with traumatic loss. Even if diverse in nature they only problematize each other further.

The impossibility of speech due to censorship may have led to the conflation of personal loss with collective trauma. In the opening poem of *Música amenazada* the poetic voice jumps backwards and forwards from its own trauma to collective trauma. Some of the closing lines are ambiguous if we take into account previous stanzas. The second line of the poem: “descendiendo por las cloacas de mi tristeza” (103) apparently sets an intimate tone that will nevertheless disappear in subsequent stanzas, for the personal is merged with the collective in the final lines of the poem. The use of the verb of movement “descender” (to go down, to descend) already indicates the semi-reflexive stance adopted in many other poems analysed. For the descent runs through the poetic voice’s metaphorical “sewers” to somewhere deep down, at the bottom, at the origin of misery.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps, down there, an explanation awaits—whence all this sadness comes? What foul waste is blocking meaning? It is left unsaid.

What we know is that he cannot bear any more reality: “El siglo veinte me golpeaba como a un gong/ Mi cráneo acabará resonando a chatarra” (103). The poetic voice cannot

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<sup>84</sup> To this descending movement that memory effectuates Grande also refers with the term “tobogán”: “en el tobogán donde la memoria se divierte y se marea y grita de terror y se ríe” (2003: 219).

bear any more sewerage draining its head. The twentieth century ages: “Se envejece muy rápido en Europa” (103). So, when in the fifth stanza we read what follows we never know whether it is the poetic voice, its country, Europe or the whole century that which is subjected to segregation, menace and contempt:

Entre segregación, amenaza y desprecio,  
dentro del mastodonte informe de mi siglo,  
oigo balar antiguas ovejas. (103)

To be sure, one never knows if the above is exactly what the poetic self wants to write, one never knows whether Grande is saying less, saying differently, being aware of censorship. There is a region of silence in this not knowing. And one never knows if fleeing from memory or fleeing to good memories has to do with not being able to bear very much reality or whether it is rather an act of self-censorship.

Other poems, as the following stanza shows, track down the original loss further back to the outset of life, in the poetic voice’s birth:

Memoria: humeas. –Con aquel bagaje  
fleté en el tiempo, con aquellas muletas  
di en correr adolescencia adentro;  
me fui poblando poco a casi nada  
y toda cosa nunca pude olvidar si era sombría;  
hasta que un día supe que mi aquella  
enfermedad novena del nacer (he aquí la cuestión)

abdicó sobre esta larga convalecencia con recaídas en que ahora consisto  
y a la que llamo mi existencia, proféticamente. (50)

It is loss that leads to perceptions of existence as a fatal illness conducing to death. Space and the passage of time are constantly seen from the viewpoint of death. A cemetery becomes the poetic self's humble dwelling ("una pensión sencilla", 40) and time has ceased to exist ("Me puse/viudito y a las márgenes del tiempo", 40).

These losses are also transfigured into certain configurations of time and space. Time is interiorized as a loss and so is the emotional structure of space. From the very occurrence of this early traumatic loss onward, the continuation of time is systematically negated and decomposed in fragments of time and remnants of the past. The poetic voice looks at the past from the perspective of the devastation it created and the ruins it left behind: "El tiempo de sudor de aquel verano/se denigró hasta mera arqueología que tiritita de historia" (41). The past has become arrested, leaving no room for the change that memory operates. Loss is interpreted as a kind of impenetrable void. What is worse, it leads to the perception that the future does not follow the past. In such a state of suspension from any meaningful attachments to a past that "is not the past" (Butler 2003: 467), there can be no memory: "Las aves que ahora anidan este alero son nietas, no recuerdan" (41). It only brings out pessimistic bouts of no memory: "el recuerdo,/algo que se desconcha hasta quedar de una fealdad solemne" (42). "The past that is not the past" is the idea behind the following lines: "Pero cómo modificar/ cuanto ya no te pertenece/ Ahora y ayer ya no caminan juntos" (379).



According to LaCapra, historical loss is to be distinguished from transhistorical absence.<sup>85</sup> In Grande's work we can talk about loss, absence and lack. On occasions they are clearly identifiable, although they present themselves interwoven more often than not. Conflation of the biographical with the historical and structural pervades Grande's poetry, although it is not always manifestly apparent. Preeminently, losses are presented as structural absence in that they are approached as painfully insurmountable, frequently eliciting an ineffective search for biographical/historical causes. This occurs, for instance, in "Nevermore, dijo el cuervo" (a title and theme borrowed from Poe's "Nevermore"), wherein the elusiveness or difficulty in producing an account of a past time is conflated with the urge to find a historical/biographical reason for the emergence of suffering:

¿Y nunca más nos saldrá mamá un pecado  
de un pescozón, para que la tristeza no nacía con causa,  
sino este ahora de tristeza unificada,  
pescozón permanente ¡y cómo, si mamá ya no pega!  
qué saldamos, por qué no se nos da  
un sentido para sufrir, ahora que mamá envejece? (48)

A unified sadness without a cause, and for which a sense is not found is what prevents the poetic voice, notwithstanding its efforts, from freeing itself from traumatic loss. The poetic voice shows its perplexity about the fact that the wounds inflicted long ago (symbolically "mamá ya no pega") retained their powerful and ineluctable influence

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<sup>85</sup> The difference between absence and loss, argued by LaCapra (2001), has been already noted.

over the present. The adjective “unified” accompanying sadness is wittingly inserted here, for there is no better way to describe a pervasive melancholia without fissures. The introjection of loss leading to melancholy lacks for the surviving self a rational explanation. We may infer from the adjective “unified” that suffering and sadness cannot be subjected to a work of deconstruction that would eventually liberate some meaning, through its dissection into manageable concepts.<sup>86</sup> Thus the historical/biographical wound is made structural (“pescozón permanente”, 48) and the structural loss is permanently bemoaned, for pain does not justify itself every time the self is engulfed by it.

The poem “Generación” (*Taranto*) attempts to look for historical answers to the metaphysical question of having been born and being painfully alive. The poetic voice feels guilty for being in pain, so it embarks on the task of finding a justification:

Adolescencia, cállate, vayamos  
por orden, narremos la caída: no parezca  
lujo el susodicho ay. Nacer (he aquí la cuestión)  
como has nacido, donde has nacido, para qué has nacido. (49)

This unusually autobiographical account stands out as one of the poems where the temptation of enmeshing the biographical and the collective in structural loss is almost avoided. The reader is incited to look into the historical “archives” of the poetic voice’s pain and the horror of its time: “vean crónicas” (49). In this poem the year the author was born is fatally enmeshed in the Spanish Civil War. In it, there is a clear enumeration of

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<sup>86</sup> About the power of deconstruction to deal with loss, see LaCapra (1999) and about the deconstruction of melancholia, see Kristeva (1989).

biographical causes of pain (war, extreme poverty, derangement and illness caused by war and lack of means), which the poetic voice normally skews by converting those historical losses into a transhistorical and sempiternal state. An uncanny will to give an account and deconstruct trauma, for this happens rarely, is stated by the opening gambit in which a few lines make an encouragement statement to confront the personal crisis: “Anda, no más; resuelve,/ considera tu crisis, suma, sigue,/ tájala, bájala, ájala” (49). In fact, more often than not in the poetry of Grande each experienced death or suffered loss is made equal to other losses, that is, they are unified into a single vast and unspeakable loss. Thus the treatment of loss allows for the blurring of different losses. Distinguishable and unique losses become undistinguished within the whirlwind of grieving. Vague pain acts as the centripetal force gathering all losses and turning them into identical psychic objects which do not belong to the poetic self: “Qué traes, ¿dolor? [...] ¿o sea, que eres/ la vieja avispa en la testuz del mundo?” (43). Individually rooted pain is then converted into a metaphysical universal condition inflicted without beginning in the subject.

*Blanco spirituals* is the only work in which war and collective fear and pain are clearly confused and fused with personal suffering through a process of identification. In “Diana” from *Taranto*, the poetic voice abandons the search for a personal cause of its pain by diluting it in the ocean of everyday tragedies of anonymous people:

los que en el tren no van ni vienen ni se trasladan,

los que llevan a sus casas el suicidio de un amigo

los que se arrugan ante un nombre amado

[...]

vengan, que para ellos tengo una ventana y un trozo de preguntas filiales  
pues la fraternidad cuaja de noche, especialmente. (45-46)

Using collective catastrophe as a reminder of its own suffered injustices, the poetic voice reproaches itself: “no te da vergüenza?/¡mira no hay desamparos que te ven!” (46). It does indeed not wish to usurp the place of genuine victimhood. In “Pregón” the poetic voice insults itself and reproaches itself for being a town crier of its own unbearable pain:

No usurpes, seamos civilizados. Y bellos,  
no como tú, gibado de yoísmo, dromedario de tiempo,  
fea cosa, que ni conviene, ¡según dicen! (44)

We can see the originality of Grande’s approach here too. For he puts forward in his poetry, even if briefly mentioned, the debate around the ethics of identification. Does it constitute a genuinely ethical stance to claim to feel the pain of others or to take their place as victims? Can one compare or draw parallels among different kinds of suffering? Do these enumerations of other people’s tribulations not hide a wish to avoid confrontation with something else, perhaps the poetic self’s personal losses? And why does guilt loom over these descriptions of painful existences?

A sense of guilt does not automatically lead to revenge or to pointing accusatory fingers. Very rarely does the poetic voice embark on the task of looking for culprits, as is the case with the poem “Como el nombre de un dios”. The poetic voice rejects biographical remembering in favor of a vicarious remembering of collective injustices. For instance, in “Diana” recalling is preceded by the statement that there is no intention to

find causes, culprits or responsibilities. Culpability is diffused and fails to find its object, the cause of suffering being more often than not unknown:

Qué me habrán hecho. Cuándo me habrán pegado con una  
cadena. En qué lugar del acerico de mi edad quedó clavado  
todo aquello, que no conozco bien.

Cuantos me hicieron daño son unos asesinos. No puedo odiar-  
los, no sé ya exactamente quiénes son. (270)

The stance is rather one of melting its own pain with an undetermined and generalized suffering rooted in common fears of a historical time: “Sufro porque van a caer bombas” (270). Throughout Grande’s work we find poems where there is the blending of the poetic voice’s sadness with the sadness of whole communities (the gypsies and the Jews) or the suffering brought about by catastrophic times (the twentieth century with its destruction in the opening poem of *Música amenazada* or throughout *Blanco spirituals*). As Kristeva remarks, the pain inherent in melancholia confers unity and coherence, precisely the plenitude the melancholic self lacks. In this sense, the persistence of pain also points to the poetic voice’s attempt to avoid disintegration by conjuring up in the imagination some sort of communion with an imagined community—the community of those drowned and condemned of whom the poetic voice expresses that: “tal vez huyendo de mi propio terror [...] llegué a desear el beso ecuménico” (103).

“Oh materia materia” illustrates the fact that losses are alluded to but never mastered or conquered. In it, the poetic voice refers to psychic material which is described in terms of horror, impossible defeat and psychic attachment to negativity:

“Nuestra palabra favorita es *no*” (375). This negativity has to do with resistance to denying the losses inherent in a world divided by violence and submission which is described as “obediencia penuria y cadenas” (376). And even though the poem apparently speaks of an “I” and the group of people this pronoun represents, the unknown characters of the poem, hidden in the first-person plural of “somos” (“we are”), can be regarded as symbolizing a moral attitude, one that has to do with looking horror directly in the eye: “Y arañando a la oscuridad/ reconocemos al terror/ en nuestro propio corazón” (377).<sup>87</sup> Such an ethical stance bears on the courage to confront the opacity of loss, its impossible mourning. It all suggests a situation in which the poetic voice is prompted to resist the silence posed by that which is occult, for such a “secret” is a “stain” that jolts the continuation of life: “Cuanto oculta a lo oculto nos mancilla” (375). Through dismantling the hidden, the “secret” at the core of sense of guilt, the possibility of survival is established. Yet, at the same time, bearing witness to loss pays the high toll of torture in a culture dominated by unmourned death drives.<sup>88</sup>

Desde el origen de las comunidades

nos vienen arrojando al fuego

Nuestra palabra favorita es *no*

por ella nos aíslan nos torturan

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<sup>87</sup> This is also an ethical or unethical attitude adopted by certain kinds of autobiographical writing. Bolaño, for instance, refers to the kind of writing that never ends because it ends with blood: “termina con sangre, es decir, no termina nunca” (2004: 207). Similarly, in the poetry of Grande, there seems to be no redemption from a past which is not followed by a happy resolution (end) in the future.

<sup>88</sup> See Sánchez-Pardo’s definition of “cultures of death drive”, pp. 27-28.

nos asesinan como a perros. (375)

The recourse to self-aggression is a complex response to external persecution, whereby responsibility is diluted in the indefinite pronoun “they”: “Ellos tienen razón yo estorbo/ Yo no deseo destruir ellos están dispuestos” (380). Violence generates a response of submissive fear, or an active but impotent commitment to bearing witness to violence: “Yo ausculto la guerra y veo/ barro fémures violaciones” (380). Violence produces and is produced by fear: “Yo creo que el miedo y la agresión/ tienen una frontera que a menudo los une” (380). The poetic self internalizes the “secret” (sense of guilt) as punishment: “Oh material materia qué ominoso castigo/ tu propia ceremonia innombrable” (377).

The only thing that cannot be “muted” in the silence inhabiting the poetic voice’s work of mourning is pain. Pain emerges as a kind of resistance against the idea that something is irretrievably lost. Its cry is ever present, sometimes assuming the tones of a protest. For silence, be it in the form of traumatic loss or the violent prohibition of speech, constitutes an emotional burden whose discharge becomes increasingly imperious for the poetic voice by making its survival dependant on it. Discharge here means the necessity to find a place for that which is unlocatable or displaced. At the expense of this very same unlocatability, the loss is preserved. In other words, suffering contributes to the maintaining of the thing lost, preventing its dying.

There is a libidinal attachment to sadness made manifest in expressions which show the poetic voice’s sensual attraction to it. The poem “La pantera” allegorizes such an attachment. It is also a metaphor of impossible mourning. “Pantera” is regarded as a sensual animal to the point that at an erotic level, when the word is used to refer to a

woman, it normally means sexual voraciousness and voluptuousness. This is how the poetic voice sees sadness too. The poetic voice claims:

Ella, desde su agilísima forma cubierta por el ébano centelleante, se acerca para seducirme con sus movimientos de acero: miro su brillo hipnótico lamentando la pobreza de mi poder y recuerdo las veces en que nos hemos arrojado al pasillo, hermanados por el común deseo de aniquilación. Nuestro incesto se va fortaleciendo gracias a un estilete de rencor en cuyo filo sonrío una ternura desconcertante: aprendemos que el odio es más sensual que la piedad. (264)

The feminizing of sadness and its being addressed in terms of desire, as well as the highlighting of its potential destructiveness, is made through an odd parallel with the ways in which beauty has been traditionally depicted as irresistibly alluring. Feminine beauty has also been claimed as a source of men's powerlessness and perdition. So is sadness posed in the poem. It is objectified (I am tempted to use here T.S. Eliot's term "objective correlative") and personified as having a beautiful head and being splendidous. In setting out to come up with a means for removing sadness, the poetic voice indulges in lust. This leads to the paradox that sadness is called a monster and a sister. So incest marks the erotic relationship held in the poem between the poetic voice and personified sadness. It is nevertheless an erotic—incestual—love that hurts:

Usé todas las armas contra tu cabeza bellísima y oscura, todas las armas contra tu esplendor, todas las armas contra el desatino de tu inmortalidad. Esta pantera es mi hermana mayor. Me vigila como un océano a la costa y me nombra por sus diminutivos. Yo la vigilo como un reo de muerte a los minutos, y le llamo Tristeza a falta de un nombre más vasto y depravado. (264)

By virtue of such an ambiguous erotic *rapport* the poetic voice polarizes sadness as both affective affiliation and harm or even utter destruction. In fact, from the first



published work by Grande, *Taranto*, the poetic voice seeks affiliations in order to re-establish some sort of connections or relationship that would put loss into perspective. Looking for affinities and objectification leads to an empowering position that attempts to tame sadness. Those strategies act as tools which help the poetic voice to defend itself against sadness by both taking distance from and identifying with it. The need to ward off sadness is conflated with a longing for its protection. If it were not for what the poetic voice gains from its attachment to sadness, the hope to overcome sorrow would not be seen as unbearable.<sup>89</sup>

Diles que me defiando de tus arañazos. Diles que mi mayor lujuria consiste en meditar tu destrucción. Diles que contraataco a todas horas con la insoportable esperanza de desmenuzar poco a poco tu compacta agresión, tu existencia, tu proximidad, tu memoria. (264)

Does the poetic self wish or not to overcome sadness? The use of adjectives such as the above makes it ambiguous. The relationship of the poetic voice with sadness is ambivalent. In “Generación” there is a line in which the poetic voice claims to refuel its own sadness with others’ disgrace: “y salgo por las calles, chirriando,/ a repostar desdicha en todas las ojeras fiscales” (51).

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<sup>89</sup> The poetic voice’s attitude toward sadness is ambivalent, for at times it relinquishes the struggle to claim power over sadness, precisely because it finds a reassuring coherence, paradoxically, in a “sound” sadness (without fissures). In prose, Grande writes: “¿El combate desde el renunciamiento como medicina contra la desesperanza? [...] una bestia que avanza para aplastarnos la armonía del total desconsuelo” (1975c:32). Both the aggression carried out by sadness and its eventual overcoming represent for the poet similar “beasts”, posing two different kinds of risk (without sadness the poetic self remains unbearably “empty”, therefore, self-less). This is congruent with the way Grande’s poetic voice sees, contradictorily, health in illness (see the discussion about insomnia, below).

There is something revealing about the ways the poetic self engages with pain. The persistence of suffering is silencing in that it contributes to the maintenance of silence. The pain that a loss produces constitutes in itself a kind of fidelity which confers, paradoxically, a sense of coherence and unity within disruption. It is then understandable that throughout Grande's poetry one can clearly see a determined will to conserve and cherish pain. Yet this refusal to relinquish pain equally springs from the poetic voice's belief that only pain preserves memory; moreover, that pain is the oxygen that feeds memory. The attempt to give birth to memory is in itself a sign that there has been a loss, and pain constitutes for the poetic voice the means to keep loss from becoming conclusive and final: "sufrir es la ganancia en lo perdido" (1996: 136):

Para las hemorragias del olvido  
tengo estas vendas de dolor amargo:  
con mi dolor a mi memoria alargo  
y así preservo cuanto ya he perdido. (1996: 137)

So, pain preserves that which is lost and, for the poetic voice, even if it leads to lethargy, it also maintains some sort of vitality due to its fury:

Para mi corazón descolorido,  
amenazado ya por el letargo  
del largo adiós, aún guardo sin embargo  
la furia de esta pena en que he caído. (1996: 137)

Pain is, furthermore, the antidote against forgetting, characterized in the sonnet as evil. Other lines of the sonnet refer to oblivion with less frantic but equally unequivocal terms. Oblivion is a shameful, dishonest and unfixable error, “afrenta irreparable”, leading to a faded memory:

De pausas y de arritmias y de arena  
vierte Olvido su afrenta irreparable  
sobre el error de la memoria mustia. (1996: 137)

Only an invigorated memory might resist its own dissolution by way of turning into an erratic memory, bound to have an inconsistent and slippery nature. Such is the impression that words like “arena”, “pausas” and “aritmias” convey. Here, again, pain appears as that which cures—in its being identified with the terms “hospital”, “yodo”, “gasa” and “reparación” —, paradoxically too, as opposed to that which needs cure:

contra ese mal es hospital mi pena  
y es el aullido un yodo comfortable,  
gasa el dolor, reparación la angustia. (1996: 137)

What sonnets like the above evoke is a sense of radical prevalence of memory over forgetting at the cost of endless pain:

una concepción romántica que, entre el alivio engañoso del olvido —engañoso y estafador— y la plenitud del dolor, elige siempre esa plenitud del dolor y se resiste, con violencia, al olvido [...] (1996: 153)

Furthermore, Grande writes about a kind of pain that is ancient like the earth or, as Luis Rosales puts it, “esa tristeza que es más antigua que la carne” (1981: 227). That pain coming from the furthest distances in time and leaving a mark on the poetic self like an animal is marked when hunted with an harpoon: “Marcado está en mi cráneo aquel escarnio, / como un arpón remoto” (329). This state is often associated with loneliness as in “Dolmen de soledad, lecho de frío”, although it is more frequently linked to a remote and unknown cause.

The poetic voice frames its own experience of loss within the context of the pain of others, or it attempts to objectify pain through its conversion into transhistorical absence: “Llora cuanto lo necesites por esa cordillera de ausencia que has heredado desde lo más remoto de tu raza” (398). This might be seen as a strategy to confront trauma. And yet, inherent to this operation of transforming loss into insoluble absence is the risk of foreclosing the possibility of finalizing the process of mourning. For sadness is converted into an unavoidable and even desirable emotional attachment. Silence in that case would mean, as Derrida observes in the opening quotation, the experience in which working through losses cannot be brought to completion, so sadness never ends. For the poetic voice, this void emerging from the impossibility of coming up with an historical narrative becomes the source of unlimited melancholia, and it prompts feelings of constant loneliness and isolation. The poetic voice’s identification with silence is such that it implies a relinquishing of mourning. In “Madrigal” it states:

Soledad, tú no eres un sereno vacío;

tú eres esta distancia, tú eres esta impotencia,

tú eres mi sentimiento inútil, sin destino,  
tú eres mi pequeñez desnuda, sin soberbia.  
[...]  
Tu vida está a jirones como la vida mía  
[...]  
tú eres algo que un día se quedará conmigo  
para siempre, y entonces no nos daremos cuenta. (71)

#### **4.3 Awakening to trauma and the role of art**

*Tengo la prisa del insomne que una noche descubre*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

*Despertar de este modo es excesivo*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

*Es clara la hermosura*

*de mi memoria aterrada*

*en cada despertar*

(Juan Gelman, *Incompletamente*)

*Art is a quest for order and sanity*

(Al Alvarez, *The Writer's Voice*)

Beauty (art) has a role in the context of trauma. It may lead to certain cognition, even if partial or incomplete. It can also help to heal. Awakening to trauma through poetry is this section's concern. To be more precise, how the re-enactment of this awakening metaphorically takes place. In the poetry of Grande, awakening from either literal sleep or a symbolic state of drowsiness indicates the coming out of a state in which one was severed from the consciousness of an excess. It is as if an insomniac one night discovered something brutal, a meaning or link that it had long been missing. Awakening refers to momentarily seeing through the dense layers of forgotten memory realities that had been censored or displaced. In the work of Grande, awakening has to do with becoming conscious and aware (either in daylight or during nights of insomnia) of trauma. It is often a semi-conscious state that causes a crisis of identity—often partly resolved through artistic invocation.

Disturbing images and tormenting nightmares appear themselves as fixed mental objects, as if they were photographs or flashes of unelaborated historical material.<sup>90</sup>

...quise apartar de mí aquella imagen  
que mi destino habíame puesto en la memoria  
como un clavo torcido por golpes poco humanos

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<sup>90</sup> Levy, from her experience as a psychotherapist, recounts how patients lacking a coherent memory and suffering from torturing fragments of memory have lived experiences they can not yet put into words (1999: 243-252). In Schooler and Eich we find the following statement: "Trauma victims [...] reported that they initially remembered the traumatic event in the form of somatosensory or emotional flashback experiences, and narrative memory began to emerge only later. In contrast, nontraumatic events were recalled as narratives without sensory components" (2000: 387). Hence the appropriateness of literature, which is the realm of emotions, to deal with trauma.

y manchado de huellas digitales antiguas

y acumulada, numerosa herrumbre. (122)

However, these images are rarely fully named and symbolically elaborated. They contain the repetition of an old violence and reproduce its pernicious energy by the use of expressions of inhumane violence: “un clavo torcido por golpes poco humanos”. They evoke unrecognizable spectres:

Acaso un vómito de miedo

impulsó oscuramente a la compleja fantasía

... y creíste imaginar, por sobre el descampado,

el paso lento de un anciano

tal vez borracho; al parecer, enfermo. (121)

These images caused by fantasy come to appear during insomniac nights. The state of aroused awareness prompted by insomnia makes it impossible to leave painful recalling behind (in “Premonición” it is prospective recalling). This traumatic form of lucidity represented by insomnia is described as “an excessive coherence” (“desmesurada coherencia”, 285), a depiction that echoes the following line by Gamoneda: “la lucidez trabaja en mí como un alcohol enloquecido” (2007: 14). “No se puede soñar en ausencia de sueño”, Grande writes (1975b: 12), which amounts to say that no escape from reality is ever possible for the insomniac, his memory cannot be “repaired” by sleep. “No se puede soñar” means there is no hope. Insomnia is indeed seen as void, even a *malaise* which contains in itself the “medicine” for its cure. In his prose, Grande describes insomnia as

“esa ausencia que duele y da placer a un mismo tiempo, como si la enfermedad fuera la única posibilidad de curación” (1975b: 11).

Thus literal or symbolical insomnia describes or hints at a condition of paralysis and stagnation as well as illness. Insomnia then would be an inescapable clearness of thought leading to quasi-madness, as in a similar vein in Goya the dream of reason created monsters. In “Gravedad de la noche”, another poem built upon a night of insomnia, a couple of lines mention madness and the damage it provokes in the brain: “Por medio de esta demencia [...] /pobre cerebro disgregado” (73). The poem “Magia” equally displays the destabilizing effects of a night of insomnia for the tortured brain:

En esta noche tibia  
me asomo a la ventana,  
por el cerebro absorbo  
una fusión en llamas  
formada de pasado  
porvenir amor nada  
como un bulto está el alma. (81)

Going through the night as an insomniac erodes the self: “Voy pensando en la noche / que me gasta y se gasta” (84). Let us remember that sleep, especially in its REM phase, is necessary for a normal working of memory.<sup>91</sup> In “Otra figura del insomnio”

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<sup>91</sup> Ruiz-Vargas states: “Es precisamente durante las fases de sueño REM cuando entran en acción diversos mecanismos de consolidación de la memoria [...] la función del sueño REM no sería la



*(Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche)* we find a description of insomnia as the trigger of memory that is also revealing of the mechanisms governing the poetic process:

Mi vida más frenética, más enigmática y reunida, sucede hoy en estas horas lentas y altivas como el mar, tan silenciosas como un hilo negro, a las que llamo con el nombre pobre de insomnio. Maníaco, ayudado de pastillas y médicos, de torpes consejos y de un turbio rencor estéril, he combatido durante años al frenesí parsimonioso de este velar, sin querer ver que en él mi soledad se iba transfigurando en una especie de macabra fortuna. Pues estas madrugadas, casi estalladas de silencio y verdad, a cambio de unas migajas de salud me dan mucho: traen nombres y fantasmas de nombres. (284)

Thus it is insomnia which sets in motion the process of recalling. Yet this is a traumatic recalling, made equally of silence and truth (“silencio y verdad”), of names and ghosts of names. These are haunting names of a broken picture whose image can only be partially recomposed through its fragments and remnants. Names lacking a history (“sin un solo apellido”) or whose history is only partly revealed through the veils of things torn apart and deranged objects: “trigo sin pan, peines rotos, botones caídos”.

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de olvidar, sino la de eliminar patrones anómalos de conducta tales como las fantasías, las obsesiones o las alucinaciones” (2002: 97 and 99).

In the poem “Oscuro” of *Música amenazada* (1989: 113), one of the patterns showing trauma is awakening. Awakening is the central theme in some poems in which the poetic voice’s stability is jeopardised, only to force madness to recoil when memory is invoked and regained. Traumatic memories return as nightmares, which, Freud says, “wake the dreamer up in another fright” (cited in Caruth 1996: 92).

“Oscuro” brings to the surface, as though it were the tip of an iceberg, the latency of a hidden trauma. Apparently, it deals with insomnia, to which Grande, the historical man, has referred in his prose and critical essays as one of the causes that led him to writing poetry. Yet insomnia is only the symptom of what lies underneath, unnoticed. This technique of showing trauma by letting us know about the symptoms is a recurrent feature in the poetry of Grande. The opening line, “en la alta madrugada” echoes Cernuda’s celebrated line “en alto olvido”. Here “alta madrugada” assumes the dark tones the word “olvido” would suggest if we were to perceive it visually, as in a kind of synesthesia. In our western tradition light is synonymous with knowledge and knowledge is supposed to illuminate the darkness of ignorance. Thus “olvido” necessarily refers to a state of absence in the mind, one in which there is no consciousness. Interestingly enough, in this poem the darkness of the profound night or early morning (“madrugada”) has as much to do with forgetting as it has with memory, for the night ends in an abrupt awakening from sleep and, during insomnia, the poetic self sets out to decipher the meaning behind the nightmares that have altered its sleep.

The poetic voice, unfolded in the pronominal “you”, addressing itself—a distancing, cerebral technique—awakes from darkness—as represented by sleep, where the world is shut down as eyelids close—only to return to a similar darkness, the

“madrugada”: “Despiertas [...] /Hundes tus ojos en la oscuridad” (113). The darkness is, arguably, literal and symbolic, affecting both sleep and vigilant states:

Sales del sueño como si salieras  
de una placenta pobre, enferma. Emerges  
de entre miserias y sangre;  
de entre heridas emerges. (113)

Yet sleep, leaving aside nightmares, can also be a blank parenthesis of apparent nothingness where impressions and memories are permanently or temporarily eliminated. In this case insomnia signifies not simply lack of sleep, but also the impossibility of an escape from distressing memories. Thus, both in sleep and in an awake-state of the brain there can be no escape to a torturing consciousness, as the poem also illustrates. With lack of sleep the possibility of giving vent to perturbed memories is played off. The strain of insomnia is made even more acute by the poet’s sense of solitariness:

En la alta madrugada  
despiertas de un disparo y te parece  
que te han abandonado hace ya años  
todos los que te quieren:  
toda la soledad de un golpe sorbes  
y te quedas anciano de repente. (113)

In the following poem of *Música amenazada*, the title “Nocturno” tentatively suggests that it was written during another night of insomnia. Although there are elements in it related to trauma parallel to the previous one, I would like to stress its more hopeful tones, as, in it, the poetic voice struggles to annihilate and control the demonic force pushing him toward an identity crisis. The relationship of the poem with trauma is here explicitly brought forward and discussed by the poetic voice that this time speaks from the more direct perspective of the “I”.

The beginning of the poem is already emblematic of a post-traumatic state: “No fue sino alucinación”. The poetic voice affirms that having been continuously struck by insomnia, it attempts to escape from it, from the immobilizing state to which insomnia condemns him. But, in the following lines, we realize that he is really escaping from confrontation with its past and its memory by way of this disease:

De madrugada, entumecido  
  
por el insomnio, huí del lecho con un abrigo  
  
sobre el pijama, con mis treinta años  
  
tras de mí pidiendo socorro. (114)

The poet needs to find out who he is, to find himself in what he loves, by way of his “habits” and “objects”:

puse Beethoven, encendí un cigarrillo,  
  
[...]

acaricié los libros;

contemplé las fotografías

de los muertos que no olvido nunca. (114)

The photographs, the poetic voice tells us, belong to literary figures: Antonio Machado, César Vallejo, Cesare Pavese, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, as well as a musician painted by Delacroix, from all of whom he remembers something lovable and familiar to him. It is worth noting that “los muertos que no olvido nunca” in the poem are literature itself, embodied by the artists mentioned.<sup>92</sup> In fact, this poem is also a reflection on art, on what art does for the poet and of what he looks for in art, which is none other than becoming “serene” and being spiritually “warmed”. It is curious that his desperate desire to find comfort in art is not reducible to his own act of writing; it is in other writers’ art that he looks for comfort. The poetic voice desperately needs to hold on to the memory of his beloved “objects”: books, photographs of people he loved and music. Far from entertaining the hours when sleep is absent, the poetic voice assures us, it is a question of survival: “Iba y venía, tocaba, miraba, para sobrevivir”.

On the other hand, the poetic voice insists that art and life—the latter represented by his wife and daughter—reunited, “reunidos”, have formed his self:

Empecé a intentar rescatarme

en mis objetos y en mis hábitos

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<sup>92</sup> Art and life are interrelated here as much as the poet, as the historical man, and the poetic voice as a fictional creation are.

[...]

Todo esto es mío

Yo soy de todo esto

Que no se rompa. (114-115)

For it is precisely the unity of the self, his identity, which is being questioned by “something”, a force that could be described as the demonic power dragging the poetic voice toward madness, where all allusion to a coherent identity is lost:

Mas por debajo de mi conciencia

algo buscaba una rendija

algo pugnaba contra las paredes

de mi equilibrio y de mi libertad. (115)

This force capable of driving the poetic voice into madness is one of the obsessions that will be found throughout Grande’s work. Precisely the last cited line alludes to the precariousness of poetic identity. And throughout the poem the poetic voice fears that a fragile identity could dramatically result in the possibility of losing one’s own consciousness and becoming an unrecognizable *other*. Madness represents here negation, in the sense of inability to make the self’s experience communicable to itself, that is, the resistance to any form of self-understanding and the sense of displacement or the fear of being left alone with fixed images and nightmares without elaboration. Put differently, it

means the loss of meaningful consciousness. The poetic voice asks what its place is, and realizes that it has lost contact with reality:

Qué hago yo aquí

(¿Qué era “aquí”? ¿mi despacho?

¿mi profesión? ¿la tierra? ¿mi existencia?

[...] Otro.

Era horrible: fui otro). (115)

Yet memory progressively re-appears to the tormented poetic voice to restore to it its consciousness:

Las fotos, los objetos, la música

la respiración confiada

de los que amo [...]

Todo inició un lento regreso [...]

De nuevo

mi conciencia conmigo. (115-116)

“Nocturno” is the re-enactment of an identity crisis, which contains a reflection on poetry, art and memory. The latter elements are not that which disrupts the equilibrium of the self; on the contrary, they constitute the quest that makes it possible for the poetic

voice to recover sanity by reminding him of who he is and what he loves. What is interesting to note is the intersection of both the poetic voice's act of producing a contribution to its own salvation, which that particular poem represents, and the desperate recourse within the poem to the art of others to fulfill such salvation. That is, an intersection is produced between the levels of writing and reading.<sup>93</sup> The memory of reading here is confounded with the writing of memory. It is in this sense that one can reasonably state that trauma is being re-enacted at the same time as it is being worked through.

In *Memoria del flamenco* Grande observes that any attempts to go back to the roots of music, that is, laying bare its origin, would lead to madness:

Afanarse en hallar las raíces de la música es una actividad entre emocionada y demente. [...] Si ese vertiginoso viaje de regreso pudiera remontar la abundancia del tiempo, en la llegada nos estaría esperando la locura. [...] Y todo empeño por llegar al centro de ese ejército de interrogaciones nos dejaría flotando en el asombro y acaso en el temor, con la razón desvariada. (1999: 128-129)

Ultimately, the passage above constitutes an analogy of the process of working through described in poems such as “Nocturno”. The purpose of returning to the origin in order to know, to gain comprehension, passes through having to confront so many disturbing interrogations that the whole process of attaining knowledge turns into a reliving of madness, the same madness which may be underlying the artistic drive. And

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Middleton and Tim Woods have declared that “reading itself is a practice of memory” (2005: 5).



yet, paradoxically, this has also a calming effect. Perhaps the best description of what art does for the poet is found in Grande's words about music, which can be perfectly applied to poetry as well. Music, like poetry, is the indestructible object that gives way to the psychic organization of loss and traumatic wounds:

Quizá la música, memoria de ese desvarío, sea también una compasiva forma de la fascinación, una manera cordial de ansiolítico: algo que, al mismo tiempo que nos prueba que hemos sido infinitos [...] nos da un beso en la fiebre, nos lame la herida incurable, le pone una especie de nombre al ansia que no tiene fin, que sólo puede aspirar a ocasional reposo. Prueba de una abundancia frenética y al mismo tiempo ordenación de esa abundancia. (1999: 129)

Yet achieving understanding of the past is a double-edged weapon, for it might deceive with its pretence of certainty but also menace us with its obscurity and the abyss that undermines it. So, the poet recommends prudence if we wish to arrive "donde quizá la certidumbre y la sombra nos fulminarían con su elocuencia vasta –y, tal vez, también ilegible" (1999: 129). Grande knows the risks of knowing and his poetry conflates a fear to know with a determined will not to accept a threatening forgetting. And this is where insomnia acquires its metaphoric meaning. Insomnia represents involuntary remembering of threatening psychic material. And it also mostly represents a kind of lucidity that is deeply traumatic. Insomnia, the impossibility of being other than awake in the sense of consciously aware, binds the poetic voice to a state of perennial and painful recalling. Hence nights of insomnia are synonymous with memory: "y en la noche, adversaria del olvido" (1996: 134). And they are identified with a kind of remembering

that plays havoc and elicits madness: “de noche, la resurrección de la memoria y esta locura mansa como un gong extenuándose” (1925c: 27).

Thus night is associated with a pellucid memory, a use of memory without complacencies, one which, turned into art, creates consciousness of suffering. But again, it is a circle (“noria” in the line), a wheel whose point of departure coincides with the arrival. According to Blanchot, “art is primarily the consciousness of unhappiness” (1982: 75), and this is what memory associated with insomnia and the state of ever awakening appears to represent. The night symbolizes for the poet the anguished experiencing of a void. In “Sueño” from *Años*:

La noche es un gran cero,  
  
nada y nadie hay en ella, está desierta.  
  
Iluminado y silencioso  
  
salgo a la sombra y busco y nada encuentro  
  
y vuelvo tembloroso,  
  
miro hacia atrás y entro  
  
en mi cuarto... (1975b: 224)

“Boceto para una placenta” illustrates how the use of the condition of insomnia is also symbolical and not only literal. In this poem insomnia means the realization or awakening toward the fact that time has destroyed the natural homeostasis of the poetic self and, therefore, identity has been torn into pieces. Whenever time (memory) fractures so does identity. This is the reason behind the description of identity as a “resumen

amenazado” (153). As in the lines of “Nocturno” reproduced above there is an adverbial reference to an unidentifiable site or state pointing to this break:

La vida aquí es muy frágil  
la vida aquí es esquirlas  
me falta tiempo o bien el tiempo aquí está roto  
y agrupándolo me desgasto. (191)

One can pose some of the same questions the poetic voice addressed to itself in “Nocturno”: What is “here”? (“¿Qué era 'aquí'? [...] ¿la tierra? ¿mi existencia?”). As will be seen, “aquí” in the work of Grande denotes a non-place where time is divided and there is an identity crisis. Hence its inherent contradiction: here is a nowhere. And, once again, as in “Nocturno” the recourse to emotionally charged objects of memory and the memory of his readings and his music restore some unity and sense where there was none:

cuando reúno gente en casa y bajo la escalera corriendo  
y regreso con vino y pongo un disco y otro  
y leo Machado a quienes ni siquiera lo desconocen  
no es amistad tan sólo, es impaciencia, es  
como apartar piedras de alguna galería derrumbada. (191)

It is not difficult to see how implicitly the ruins of this gallery constitute the “aquí”, the image of the poetic voice’s existence. In relation to the role of art, the poetic voice needs the wound of the Other, represented by the literary and artistic works of those the

poet admires. This identification with the wounds of others, wounds writers or artists of all sorts have turned into words in their works, helps elaborate and heal one's own wound. In principle, what the reading of other survivors' works provide is an interpretative frame and a terminology. Vallejo is a clear example of this process of identification and projection. In an early book dedicated to the "master", Grande clarifies what both writers have in common, which is: the infant roots of trauma: "velarse a gritos la costra de la infancia adolescente" (32). In "Gemela temprana" he writes:

Con esta voz de luto  
adónde iré que no me miren negro  
Infancia sola y triste, tú has culpado  
mi vida. (39)

Insomnia and awakening: "cuánto te despertabas al despertar y cuánto/ insomnio añejo te colgaba del párpado hasta el suelo" (32).

An important feature of Grande's poetry is the fact that the recalling of the poetic voice's memories is indirectly produced through the recalling of other people's wounds, as in the case of Vallejo. This is why the notion of postmemory is central to his work. Postmemory, referred to in Spanish as "memoria diferida" (Rico 1998), defines second-hand or vicarious memories in that the situations they recall have not been directly lived by the survivor but by the survivor's family or close relatives.<sup>94</sup> The interesting thing is

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<sup>94</sup> Beatriz Sarlo clarifies the notion: "La palabra "posmemoria", empleada por Hirsch y Young, en el caso de las víctimas del Holocausto (o de la dictadura argentina, ya que se ha extendido a estos hechos), describe el caso de los hijos que reconstruyen las experiencias de sus padres, sostenidos por la memoria de éstos pero no sólo por ella. La posmemoria, que tiene a la memoria en su

that in the work of Grande the notion of postmemory could be extended and defined in the following way. He uses the memories upon which other writers have written in order to understand and work through his own memories.

Consider the following passage of the opening poem of *Taranto*, the work that Grande dedicates to Vallejo:

y entre lo que yo pensaba  
recordaba tus recuerdos  
llenos de hambre y de cárcel  
y de pesadumbre llenos,  
y entre lo que yo iba hablando  
eran tus trágicos versos  
que se incorporaban como  
irresistibles enfermos. (27)

Strictly speaking, we cannot remember what happened to others. Yet, due to the fact that one of the components of memory is imagination—imagination is necessary whenever the processes of identification and projection are set in motion—, the poetic voice’s memories are interwoven with the emotional burden of Vallejo’s memories or, to be more precise, with the reading of Vallejo’s writing of his own memory. For how is it possible—as the line “recordaba tus recuerdos” tells— to remember other people’s

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centro, sería la reconstrucción memorialística de la memoria de hechos recientes que no fueron vividos por el sujeto que los reconstruye” (2005: 129).

memories? Experiences are not transferable. Understanding and empathy are only produced from the stance of shared ways of making sense of the world, and such is the case with the tragic experiences of loss and mourning common to Grande and Vallejo. Thus the notion of postmemory can fittingly be applied to the weaving and unweaving of first-person memories with memories that one could not possibly live but which nevertheless contribute to the construction of our own memory.

#### **4.4 Spatializing trauma or the content of the form**

Memory is always framed in space. In trauma space is alluded to in the form rather than in a specific content for which the form would serve as a conduit. In trauma there is not a structuring of space in recognizable forms of narration, for traumatic recalling gives way to a more problematized organization of space. Places in Grande's poetry are places of no memory. Anne Whitehead uses the term "non-places". Butler calls them places of "no belonging" (2003: 468). Rather than places, therefore, we ought to regard them as psychic spaces of melancholia which are characterized by a fusion and con-fusion of forms that testify to a problem with boundaries.<sup>95</sup> Such a problematic is substantiated in the difficulty of finding a balanced demarcation between inside and outside, that is, between individuation and the social. The impossibility of containing experience within recognizable spatial limits, due to its nonreferential status, is instantiated by the

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<sup>95</sup> Sánchez-Pardo points out that "the space of melancholia is an uncertain space, whose form is drawn and redrawn until it becomes reified and solidified and whose content is disseminated and redistributed in virtually endless ways in its interior landscapes" (2003: 214).

employment of adverbs of imprecise location, such as “aquí” and “allí” in “Superficies”. “Aquí” and “allí” only communicate a sense of not knowing, even of disavowing meaningful context. “Aquí” alludes to a zone of no sense-making: “Aquí, en la superficie/ o simulacro del sentido,/ [...] incapaces de comprender”, as does “allí”, “donde la palabra sentido/ no ha nacido ni va a nacer” (381).

The sense of no belonging is also conveyed through the employment of adverbialized nouns which act as places of nowhere. It is as though the poetic voice wondered in perplexity “Where is my place?, Where is my location?”. And so the answer to those questions is “catastrophe” and “loss”, “fear” and “pain”, which are nouns that act as adverbs of places of no belonging. Places are always more than mere spatial location. They are composed of physical space but, more importantly, of emotionally lived time, that is, of memory. If we leave aside the factual components of a place where catastrophe occurred, that is, if we forget the contextual minutiae that can be put into narrative, we are faced with the experience of utter void. However, even when the foreground elements of memory are gone or have never existed, the emotions attached to such a memory cannot be easily deleted. This is so because they have not yet been rendered into factual narrative experience. Thus the impossibility of articulating experience, of putting it into narrative means, precludes the possibility of working through emotions of pain and fear. These emotions, lacking a narrative frame, can only be conveyed as an excess that lacks meaning which only context can confer. And this excess is what ultimately constitutes the spatial dimension of Grande’s poetry.

There are hardly physical places to be remembered in Grande’s poetry. The poetic voice inhabits psychic places of death or places which are not places at all, just the

reminiscence of an excess. Ultimately, the only “space” the poetic self inhabits can be said to be set within the borders of the poem. The poem thus serves the crucial end of accommodating an excess that cannot be put elsewhere. Making poetry is likened to the act of containing such a surplus which, if it were not to be contained in any other way, could lead to death itself. This is how, according to Middleton and Wood, Ann Lauterbach understands the relation of memory, poetry and trauma: “the task of reconstructing memory after catastrophe might be managed by creating a poem which simulates the energy and structure of the remembered trauma but without its poison” (2000: 191).

*Música amenazada* begins with a poem called “Inocencia” (108-109) in which an indeterminate place is continually called upon by the adverb “aquí”. We never know what “aquí” is or where it is located. We do know that whatever “aquí” means, it exceeds a referent or, more accurately, it represents an excess. If we keep reading the poem we realize that “aquí” embodies or is associated more with a state of mind which is described with the terms “nightmare”, “terror” and “insanity”. In this sense, the poem is incomplete: it tells of something we cannot grasp. We can only perceive the suffering, even become engulfed in it, although without fully understanding whence all this pain comes. The poem relives an experience it never names. Nevertheless, what the poem does manage to communicate is an excess, the same excess that in other poems the poetic voice will attempt to integrate into a narrative, failing to do so in this particular one.

The sense of being overwhelmingly constrained by a powerful and unknown entity is wonderfully rendered by the images of “blind birds between walls” (“ciegas aves entre muros”), where the adjective “blind” and the expression “birds between walls”



doubly emphasize a two-fold idea. On the one hand, there is the poetic voice's effort to find a way out (to fly out of the nightmare). On the other hand, the difficulty or near impossibility of such a task. In other poems, for instance, "En este poema" (*Cuaderno de Lovaina*) we find the same feelings of imprisonment: "yo aprieto los dientes y paso como puedo" (380). The poetic voice's difficulty in liberating itself from being enchained to the oppression of continuous suffering is clear in "La pantera": "yo vivía como la palabra socorro. Yo vivía en legítima defensa. Usé todas las armas contra tu cabeza bellísima y oscura, todas las armas contra tu esplendor, todas las armas contra el desatino de tu inmortalidad" (264). In admitting that there is insanity in the perpetuity of pain, the poetic voice implicitly claims its pathological inability to mourn.

Further on, we find the following lines:

Aquí,  
  
poca belleza;  
  
no es hermoso esto:  
  
demasiado profundo. (108)

What is "here" ("aquí"), what does the poetic voice mean by "this" ("esto")?

Whatever it is, there is an attempt to seek an origin for "esto" by returning to the origin itself, the beginning of humanity. The poetic voice not only gives birth to the poem but, more interestingly, the poem registers in itself the birth of the world, a birth that reproduces the origin. The poem is, thus, a return to the origin. In "Inocencia" the origin is invoked not only as the unnameable place which is the provenance of all suffering, but, also, it alludes to the return to the origins of humanity as the constitutive trait of the

human. “Inocencia” is not only a response to the veiled and implicit questioning of the poetic voice’s suffering: it is a reliving of the pain which inheres in the origin and, by extension, in every human being.

The latter shows why it is so difficult to disentangle historical from structural trauma in Grande’s work. Let us see the lines that call upon the Origin:

Aquí,  
  
poca belleza;  
  
no es hermoso esto:  
  
demasiado profundo,  
  
sucio de origen,  
  
pegajoso aún  
  
de la placenta de la creación,  
  
lastimado aún  
  
por el dolor del parto del mundo,  
  
debitativo aún de caos primario. (108)

With “demasiado profundo”, too profound, the poetic voice seems to imply precisely the difficulty of giving form or shape to that which it seeks so desperately, in its attempt to render visible the invisible. For “demasiado profundo” stands as the very impossibility of getting to know what is beyond, what otherness or alterity is present in the poem. Further on the poetic voice affirms: “Siniestra es nuestra comprensión/ somos feroces de la nada”. Any effort to understand or to gain knowledge must, in fact, be “sinister” and

eerie insofar as beyond such vain effort awaits nothingness (“la nada”). Two more lines reinforce this sense of hopelessness. This time, nevertheless, what is unnameable is the past, put in a general and undefined way, which is also identified with shadow, an image insisting on the enigmatic nature of what is being talked about and which can also be profusely found in the work of Paul Celan:

Aquí  
el pasado es absurdo,  
residual  
e inexistente a fuerza de ser sombra. (109)

Let me say in passing that although Paul Celan might not be counted as one of the poets who influenced Grande, nonetheless the two poets have much in common. The adjective “residual” recalls Celan’s remnants. It is the traumatic dimension of their respective works that supports the association.<sup>96</sup> Curiously enough, this poem has been called “Inocencia” (being innocent) and has death as its main reference, just as the experience of Celan is marked by death imposed on innocents.

Between brackets, as if in a dream or nightmare, the poetic voice screams (the repetition can be taken as revealing the anguish in a scream):

(Aquí,  
no se quiere matar, no se quiere matar,

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<sup>96</sup> Ulrich Baer (2000) has associated through his application of trauma theory Celan and Baudelaire, two apparently very different poets.

se está cansado, se es inocente sin destino). (108)

These words come after the invocation to the origin, and “no se quiere matar” may be reliving the violence and death of it. With “inocente” the poetic voice seems to undertake the discharge of a sense of guilt. And with “sin destino” it points to the pointlessness of existence, the latter being reinforced by the following lines:

Ya no quedan resoluciones  
que miren al otro borde del morir;  
nada que viajar, ninguna espera. (108)

The recourse to expressions such as “Ya no (quedan)”, “nada” and “ninguna” emphasize the poem’s invocation of nothingness. This negativity or labour of the negative, which we also find in Celan, is, nevertheless, constitutive and not constrained or sought. Nothingness predates the poem not as a theme, but as a haunting presence, as that which resists explanation and cannot be named, the undecidable. Nothingness is the otherness that resists assimilation in language, even though language indicates its presence. The poetic voice is served by language: language is the ally. It is not the limits of language that constitute the problem. It is rather the nature of the experience that cannot be accommodated into a narrative. Ulrich Baer (2000) lucidly points out that what was traumatic and inassimilable for people in the past has been integrated into language because language has been expanded and patterns of understanding or frames have been created. The refinement of thought has only been possible thanks to the evolution and more complex elaboration of language.

Further on, some lines indicate a kind of foundering, which presumably refers to the sinking of the concept of humanity: “Esto es un lento cataclismo/ [...] Y que abdicó una noche en la prehistoria” (108). Throughout this book and the rest of the poet’s work in verse, there is a constant reference to the destruction of the concept of humanity. It is as though the poetic voice were saying that we, as human beings, are, still, at the point of departure, at the origin, that is, the beginning of our humanity.

In addition, this particular poem shows two more relevant aspects that turn out to be recurrent traits in Grande’s poetry. In the first place, structural trauma is attached to the consciousness of death. Secondly, structural trauma is enshrined in historical trauma. To make things more complicated, the latter is in its turn enshrined in the collective:

Una de nuestras manos da al vacío  
y regresa a la frente,  
la otra permanece en el horno del siglo  
y se quema y no disimula  
su dolor y su aullido natural. (109)

The imprecise reference to a place that is only referred to with a vague word, “aquí” reveals a sense of displacement and a crisis of identity, as the following lines illustrate:

Despertar de este modo es excesivo y al izarme del lecho  
mi cráneo golpea el día y lo quiebra en cristales  
la vida aquí es muy frágil la vida aquí es esquivarla  
me falta tiempo o bien el tiempo aquí está roto

y agrupándolo me desgasto qué atroz subtear. (191)

To be placed inside the vortex of trauma is to be located among the fragility of the ruins that catastrophe leaves behind. There cannot be a sense of being, sense of unity, and sense of belonging precisely where time has collapsed. Time is here interiorized as broken time; the normal flow of consciousness, interrupted. It occurs as though the self were thrown outside the course of the collective and were constrained to develop an inner time of its own, failing to do so. Here the poetic self has not managed to identify with the proper movement of the narrativity of history, where there are causes and effects, triggering events and consequences. There are no patterns of narration in this poem or in the previous poem. Ultimately, what the poetic voice finds it difficult to reach is the substance of its own self, that is, a foundational breath or rhythm that would encompass its existence. There is the urge to follow the frantic rhythm of life and not remain still, which would mean death. In other words, the poetic voice struggles to interiorize what it perceives as the demented and accelerated speed of the course of history. The poetic voice fails to situate itself within the turbulence of its time. Its own self risks ceasing or being reduced to pieces of no sense. There are two lines of the poem “Concepción Oconto” of *Blanco Spirituals* that symbolically point, notwithstanding that the context of the poem is a very different one, to the process of having necessarily to adapt to a rhythm of change. Lack of adaptation would lead to the prison of no communication: “Te encierran en una prisión sin que comprendas nada./ Y sigue la civilización su curso.” (211)

In “Superficies” of *Cuaderno de Lovaina* the referential use of the adverb “aquí” is more explicit:

Aquí, en la superficie  
o simulacro del sentido,  
[...]  
aquí en lo racional,  
en lo cotidiano, en lo amable. (381)

However, the following stanza reveals that “aquí” in “Superficies” is no other than the “allí” of poems such as “Inocencia” and “Boceto para una placenta”, that is, the core of trauma:

Allí, en el fondo, donde  
[...]  
donde la palabra sentido  
no ha nacido ni va a nacer  
[...] donde todo  
es verdaderamente horrible  
pero mucho menos impuro  
que la simulación. (381)

Grande uses these two adverbs of place dialectically to point to layers of perception or modalities of understanding. One of them remains on the surface of knowledge and is identified with the rational, and the conventional, what he calls false reason, “simulacro del sentido”. The other is compared with true knowledge and cognition but not in the sense of cognitive reason. Whereas the former precludes the possibility of genuine

knowledge, the latter allows entrance into the unknown, but also opens up the path to realities that might result disturbing: “allí, en el fondo, ¿aguarda,/ por ventura, el descanso?” (381).

The poetic self somehow asserts that our capacity to confront horror constitutes the condition of the possibility for a deeper knowledge. This is in accordance with what Caruth observed about trauma, that is, that trauma survivors in their working through are capable of grasping realities that others have only begun to face. The separation established by the adverbs “here” and “there” marks the distance between “the heroes” and “the mad”, “the leaders” and “the failed”, as is also explicitly suggested in another poem from the same collection, “En este poema” (380). The barrier dividing those two realities of the self is one which draws a line between the sordid and the innocent.

As indeterminate as “aquí” or “allí”—indeterminate in the sense of being ethereal and immaterial, notwithstanding it describes a well defined and solid poetical state—are other places of trauma. For instance, “abyecto barrio”. In other poems the poetic voice continues to convey a sense of claustrophobia through its references to dark abysses and claustrophobic deserts, the only locations in which the poetic voice manages to locate itself:

Igual que un dromedario cruza los arenales  
una y otra vez sin salir del desierto  
con su estéril nostalgia del valle, hasta que es muerto  
sobre los arenales, sobre los arenales. (64)



In reality these places are no places—they lead to death or they are in themselves deadly places. In “Cita en la ciudad vacía” (139-141) having no place as a form of being in the world is framed within the context of an uncertain city. The city symbolizes a space other than the inner, the realm where the inner encounters the outer reality. This relationship establishes itself through memory. It points from the particular—family links—to the universal: humanity, to which the poem refers as “la familia fantástica” (139). This place is not an imagined world having to do with fantasy. It is rather a way to accommodate the excess of a lacking referent. The naming of real, physical places in this poem—for instance, there are two direct references to indeterminate places: “ciudad” and “sala”—does not presuppose that they are endowed with autonomous value in the context of the rest of the poem. Even the city, which is the only space with meaningful significance, acts as a background against which the poetic voice ruminates about something vaster. The values attributed to the city—its being empty and its medieval cloister—only reinforce the points made in the poem. Here perception and remembrance are intermingled in that the poetic voice perceives the city in ways that are confused with its own remembering. And to its own remembering the imagination of inexistent memories are added too, imagination (not to be confused with fantasy) being a powerful component of memory.

“Cita en la ciudad vacía” is not only testimonial. Memory in it acts as the mechanism that connects individual memories to consciousness, exerting an influence over each other. The poetic voice extends experiences of pain and silence to an imagined vast family, as it instantiates an ethical use of memory. Memory here not only serves the end of bearing witness. It also recalls in ways that make pain’s signature indistinguishable. It suddenly becomes a universal pain.

There is a group of poems of narrative character, where the examination of places coincides, on another level, with the lack of settings hitherto analyzed. In *Blanco Spirituals* the condition of socially exiled characters such as the figures of the *clochard* and the gypsy highlight the insistence on this idea of being displaced and, therefore, having no place. Nevertheless, these poems are less interesting from the perspective of trauma, as in them the efficacy of their narrative power renders their traumatic aspects ineffectual. The potential traumatic components of the personal are here diluted in an intricate intermingling of consciousness filtered through historical events and personal experiences.

To be sure, the recurrence of non-places in the poetry of Grande denotes the fact that the poetic voice is in search of an indefinite place, which can be seen as an attempt at accommodating an excess, the very same excess at which the poetic voice awakes. This is not to say that Grande's poetry is stripped of geographical or historical references to places (the Mérida of the Civil War, his place of birth, the countryside of Tomelloso, Madrid or cosmopolitan Paris, etc.). However, reference to these places hinges on an excess that resists being localized and contained in any of them. More importantly, they are subordinated to this ultimate reference of lack of setting which is the mysterious origin of an excess that can only be found at the origin.

#### **4.5 Fear**

*la infección de humillación y de miedo con que la posguerra contaminó el aire que  
respiraban a bocanadas todos mis familiares junto a millones de españoles.*

(Grande, *La balada del abuelo Palancas*)

*Una pena y un susto eternos*

(Grande, *La balada del abuelo Palancas*)

*Creedme cuando os hable del miedo*

(Grande, *Parábolas*)

*Violenta lucidez del miedo*

Fear is a fundamental emotion in the poetic writing of Grande and one that is equally related to memory. For one of the central motives for fear that his poetry conjures up is time itself. The labour of memory, against all odds, painstakingly tries to resist the inexorable passage of time and, therefore, the terror with which the latter imbues the poetic self:

Esa parte de mi memoria

que labora febril [...]

y se obstina

(no es sino miedo, miedo al tiempo,

miedo al remoto desarrollo  
del universo, horror  
a la velocidad de las canas),  
y se obstina en regar, regar,  
regar desesperadamente  
un lento chaparrón de pánico. (249)

Fear overwhelms the poetic self as early as life begins to exist in the form of an embryo and elicits the action of curling or turning inwards: “ovillados como los fetos / crujimos de silencio y de espanto” (377). In “Oh materia materia” Grande refers to a remote fear, one which seems to appear at the moment of coming into existence, and has existed since the beginnings of time: “desde el origen de las comunidades” (375). It is life itself, in the poem “materia”, the powerfully mysterious and enigmatically unnameable reality whose very existence inflicts the punishment of fear: “Oh materia materia qué ominoso castigo / tu propia ceremonia innombrable” (377):

Nos refugiamos en nuestra cueva  
lloramos con humildad abominable  
mordemos nuestra lengua hasta vaciarla  
de sus gallardas acusaciones  
escupimos sobre nuestros espejos  
y arañando la oscuridad  
reconocemos al terror

en nuestro propio corazón. (377)

The references to cave (*cueva*) and fear, along with the instinctual metaphorical regression to the embryonic state, are reminiscent of the poems in which returning to birth was linked to the poetic voice's embrace of death. Note the similarity of the experience of María Teresa León, a territorial exiled writer who in her *Memoria de la melancolía* expresses a wish to retract to this very same reality Grande's poem also describes:

“quisiera vivir sin vivir, olvidar, aletargarse como los lagartos, creer que el principio y el fin se unen y recomienzan. ¿Se puede recomenzar? Ojalá. ¿No será algo así como morir?”

(1998: 159). Yet in “Oh materia materia”, in contraposition to the kind of situation presented by the poems analyzed earlier, it is fear that is causing involution. However, the tone assumed here is a condemnatory one, in that it deems fear to be socially approved of, calling for rebellion against an overt recognition, which is keeping humanity enchained:

En el curso de los milenios  
los lujuriosos de la sinceridad  
fuimos odiados, perseguidos  
cazados como ratas  
Las religiones y el poder  
no toleraban nuestro desprecio  
ni nuestro coraje suicida  
Hostigados, hemos optado  
por extremar nuestra iracundia

hasta llegar a denunciar  
el pánico en el fondo del placer  
la ofuscación en medio del trabajo  
el miedo a las fauces del tiempo. (376)

Fear is inextricably associated to haste. In “Letanía” from *La noria* the poetic voice implores: “dadme cosas que sirvan a esta prisa y este miedo” (477). There is a sense of urgency to stop the hemorrhage of profound sadness, which elicits action and movement. In “Letanía” an accumulation of surreal dreams, art and life memories, the physical with the immaterial, are interwoven. As if it were a prayer, there is a plea—the title already indicates this; “letanía” means prayer—for immediate consolation and an urge to fulfill an imprecise desire in which remembering, perception and desire mingle:

Dadme un celemín de trigo una manta con agujeros un cabezal  
de paja dadme un silencio que no amenace nada dadme un  
cofre con guijos blancos dadme antes de la guerra dadme des  
pués del napalm y del fósforo dadme un mundo sin asesinos. (447)

The punctuation stresses the fusion of the three temporal levels, the past of remembering, the present of perception and the future of desire. The fact that punctuation marks are missing—there are solely the pauses of the blank spaces—and that there is no capitalization as well as no interruption of lines causes the illusionary effect of a seamless course, a timeless surface without sutures or cuts. In other poems the seemingly deliberate confusion of temporal levels appears to derive from the fear of forgetting. This is the

case, for instance, of “La rumia”, as the following lines illustrate: “Ya no queda./ Desde mañana! no he dejado de memorar/ el sol aquel, la piara veintenaria, su balido volviendo el cuello”. In another stanza in the poem: “Esta noche,/ tan serena como aquellas, sino más adelante/ padre fuma en el comedor” (35). Although the poem predominantly unfolds in the past—most of its references are related to a time that no longer is—, some of the references are given in the present. As the clause “no he dejado de memorar” suggests, the actions congregated in the memory of the poetic voice are mainly past activities and, yet, they project into the present with such a powerful aura that the last three stanzas of the poem are resolved in the present tense and in the conditional form of the future. The present wishes to borrow from the past a time that no longer is but it realizes that even remembering cannot do anything to replace the time past. The last two lines of the following stanzas can be understood in this way, with “demasiado pretérito” standing for the irreplaceability of a painful loss:

Y qué no diera por mostrarle al viejo  
una almorzada de yeros sobre la mesa  
para que sepa que aquel grano quedóseme en el alma  
y para que me mire, haciendo memoria, a punto  
de sombríos, mientras fumamos hoy, a las doce.

Pero faltaría  
la rumia, la oración aquella (qué fueran unos yeros),

faltaría el olor del ganado, el lamento  
del choto mínimo faltaría, habría  
pretérito suficiente  
para que el símbolo desnudo  
nos haga daño en la médula dorsal del corazón. (36)

In “Nevermore, dijo el cuervo” (*Taranto*), the re-enactment of loss taking place in the poem is embedded in an implicit refusal to embrace loss which is also marked in language, especially in the use of verb tenses. Consider these previously quoted lines of the poem:

¿Y nunca más nos saldará mamá un pecado  
de un pescozón, para que la tristeza nacía con causa  
sino este ahora de tristeza unificada,  
pescozón permanente ¡y cómo, si mamá ya no pega! (48)

The future tense (*saldará*), the past tense (*nacía*) and the present tense (*pega*) coexist in the illusion of the possibility of the three tenses being real at the same time or, in other words, of the timelessness of the poem. In this case the memory of a loss, in itself a kind of presence, gives existence back to what no longer is. Note how this is underscored by the use of an apparently incorrect verbal form: “nacía”. The conjunctive locution “para que” requires next to it a verb in the subjunctive. Instead, the verb appears in one of the past tenses of the indicative mode. The subjunctive makes the possibility that something will come true less likely. Here, sadness was born with all the peremptory force of the



indicative mode. Furthermore, the action described in the last line (“mamá ya no pega”) is somehow questioned by the first line (“¿Y nunca más nos saldrá mamá un pecado?”) and contradicted by the lines in which it is assured that the slap on the neck (“pescozón”) is permanent.

The poem “Hermano marginal” (37-38) also shows what is stated above about the interweaving of tenses. Note the following line: “qué antiguamente observo lo desvalido que irás”, where the vision of the future (*irás*) coming from a present intended to be past is suggested by the strange combination of a present tense and an adverb denoting a time past: “antiguamente observo” (38). In fact, the simultaneous reference to past and future from the standpoint of a present in which the poetic self presents itself as an “être-pour-la-mort” is a recurrent feature of Grande’s poetry. Observe, for instance, some lines from “Magia” (*Las piedras*) in which deathly imagery (“silent neck of an old guitar” “my skull”, funeral “shroud”) is called upon to summon up death. Quevedo’s “canción fúnebre” appears to foreshadow lines in which the poetic voice personifies a shipwreck:

Aquí, [...]  
  
enjaulado de ayer  
  
deriva de mañana,  
  
como una tabla rota  
  
que se pierde en el agua,  
  
como el mástil callado  
  
de una vieja guitarra  
  
[...] el alma

pone en mi calavera  
estas señales blancas  
estos sudarios finos  
estas delgadas sábanas,  
oh cráneo. (83)

Returning to the relationship between fear and haste, “Letanía” (447) is reminiscent of a series of poems belonging to the collection *Blanco spirituals* which convey the same sense of urgency in the face of hopelessness and fear that war and a violent world cause in the speaking voice, particularly “La edad de los misiles” (236), “El peligro amarillo” (213) and “Fragmento para un homenaje a Rayuela” (193). Another good example of how fear and haste go hand in hand is “Boceto para una placenta” (191), which abounds in expressions of hastiness such as “estoy apresurado”, “me urge”, “tengo una prisa desafortada”, and so on. In fact, this poem conveys precisely the fear of things occurring too fast, leaving no room for the speaking voice to assimilate processes of change, as if too hasty a pace could lead to a precipitous miscarriage (as the word “placenta” in the title of the poem might suggest): “estamos resistiendo la precipitación de lo que nace” (192). In opposition to the latter, there is the world of the countryside in which everything was predictable and which represents the harmony of cyclic time. But, also, it is the impossibility of change in “una sociedad detenida” (as was the Spanish society of the time) which elicits fear:

Hay muchas situaciones quietas  
se empantana la realidad hiede a terreno pantanoso

se nos hundan los pies chapoteamos ¿cómo llamar sosiego  
o paz a lo que es sólo desasosiego extenuándose?  
chapoteamos con premura. (192)

Fear is constitutive of the self: “te digo que con este amor y este temor habré de ambular hasta que muera” (456), and it is related to its being wary of its own disintegration and disappearance to the extent that the poetic self asserts: “yo soy mi horror y mi disipación”, “tengo una prisa desaforada por conseguir serenidad”, “precipitadamente añoro alcanzar el equilibrio” (191). As if the wreckage had been utterly destructive and there were not time enough to repair the disaster, the poetic voice asserts: “me falta tiempo o bien el tiempo aquí está roto / y agrupándolo me desgasto qué atroz subtarea” (191). It even suggests the mending task of reading poetry: “leo machado [...] es impaciencia / como apartar las piedras de alguna galería derrumbada” (191).<sup>97</sup>

It is worth noting that in “Letanía” and many other poems whenever silence is brought to the fore it is often attached to fear. Silence is menacing, as it stems from wariness of censorship and, what is worse, the not so unlikely possibility of torture and violence. Along with surreal lines, cries and condemnatory lines are found:

Dadme un mundo con menos asesinos dadme un colibrí en la sandalia  
de mi sobrina dadme una cucharada de futuro y en el reverso  
de este vejamen dadme un papel pautado con canas de mi padre. (447)

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<sup>97</sup> Grande writes “machado” instead of “Machado” to set the disrespectful tone that characterizes *Blanco spirituals*.

Interestingly enough, the end of the poem occurs as if the poetic voice had lost the vital breath, as it does not finish the word that it had begun to pronounce and only manages to say the first letter of what one suggests is the word “sea”: “dadme algo dadme lo que sea”. This undesirable silence can be, on the other hand, the *raison d’être* of poetry, when silence indeed sings, as in “Beso pequeño” of *La noria*: “un gran silencio que canta” (437).

Yet feelings of fear are not limited to the tortured or those in danger, as the poetic voice often attributes this motif to the actions of those who commit evil and, also, to those too weak to denounce evil who apparently lead “normal” lives in the middle of imminent disaster. In “Os amaría” (445-446) the poetic voice warns of the dangers of a nuclear war and calls these “characters” the “modosos”, asking them to be more fearful so they can be more lovable:

Modosos madrugáis

y restauráis a vuestro ser

con higiene y costumbres

[...]

(Todo esto en la hora atómica

diosmío!: [...])

Un poco más de espanto os ruego

y os amaría Os amaría. (445-46)

#### 4.6 Illness, stasis and death

*Miro mis pies y mis rodillas, mi sexo y mis cartílagos,  
miro de arriba abajo esta fraterna máquina de morir.*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

*Artists [...] often have frail health, a weak constitution, a fragile personal life  
[...] This frailty, however, does not simply stem from their illnesses or neuroses,  
says Deleuze, but from having seen or felt something in life that is too great for  
them, something unbearable that has put on them the quiet mark of death.*

(Daniel W. Smith in the prologue to *Critical and Clinical* by Deleuze)

Narrative memory is like a stream. Trauma introduces discontinuity in the seamlessness of “normal” memory’s stream of consciousness. This sense of continuity taking place in consciousness is precisely what bestows a sense of duration of time. According to Henri Bergson, memory makes duration possible: “to tell the truth, it is impossible to distinguish between the duration, however short it may be, that separates two instants and a memory that connects them” (1988: 34).

In the poetry of Grande, the presence of illness in the form of a sick memory stems from the general perception that a sense of continuity or duration has ceased to exist. The poetic self often appears to have become stagnated in an unresolved past. Hence the reader is presented with representations of death resulting from an established

fissure between past and present which cannot be connected into narrative meaning. The psychological division with a past that has not been made to signify is, in fact, emotionally experienced as death. This is not to say that the poetic voice never adopts the form of narrative memory –narrative memory being, according to Juan Francisco Egea, poetry that “prefiere la anécdota y la discursividad al símbolo y a la imagen” (2004: 53). It is, rather, the absence of a fully narrative or discursive sense or, even, the poetic self’s elaboration of a void that generates the spectral haunting of death. More often than not, in Grande’s poetry the transmission of this sense of death takes place through the description or re-enactment of emotions and feelings rather than the unfolding of narrative itself.

The presence of death translates the abyss or nothingness to which the poetic self finds it so difficult to admit. Trauma is not a peripheral trait of the self but, rather, it is by nature constitutive of it. Therefore, in order for the traumatic experience to cease, at least partially, the unnarrativity and silence of the experience needs to be worked through rather than introjected. That is, it necessitates assimilation into the stream of consciousness that narrative memory represents.<sup>98</sup> This section is therefore concerned with what this sense of death means and how it is conveyed. In order to illustrate how it is a constant feature of this poetry, I will use poems from all collections which will be taken as individualized but interconnected examples.

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<sup>98</sup> In trauma theory, “introjection” means, as observed earlier on in this thesis, that trauma has not been worked through, and the self has not yet been reconciled with the lost Object, the reaction to loss being melancholia.

Perhaps due to a lack of confidence in the concept of religion and the impossibility of obtaining comfort from it, Grande sees death with utter despair. “Sordina” (110), a poem whose title already refers to silence (the *DRAE* defines “a la sordina” as “silenciosamente, sin estrépito, con disimulo”), is constructed around two axes: death surreptitiously and quietly appropriates life and is manifested in physical and emotional signs of ageing. Death as utter rejection of life appears in “Sombra de sombra”:

Eres irreparable como una muerte. Eres  
tu propia enfermedad. Eres como un desierto.  
Eres el no del vivo sombrío. Eres la sombra  
que pudiera nacer de la sombra del tiempo.  
[...] tu tránsito,  
una especie de nunca, una especie de lejos. (74)

In “Magia” (81-84) from *Las piedras*, we find the line “Aquí estoy como una sombra desenterrada” (82). And in “Noviembre llueve”:

Comprendías entonces que tu vida, tu amada  
vida, tu única vida, tu pobre don, parece  
una mano cerrada por donde todo huye  
hasta que te clavaras los dedos en ella para siempre. (72)

Note how life is defined with the metaphor “mano cerrada por donde todo huye”, which is closer to deathly notions of existence than to life itself. If we associate life with

openness, affirmation, possibility and permanence, the expression above recalls the opposite: closeness and closure, impossibility, negation and loss into absence. In the poem “Canción callada” (77) from *Las piedras* this point is developed further. In it the poetic voice simultaneously identifies itself with a wide-open door and a window, synonymous with life as openness and, further on, it is said that both door and window are left ajar, meaning that they are partially closed to that which is gone and left behind, and so the self is:

Mi puerta y mi ventana abiertas

soplan vida en mi corazón:

me he enamorado de lo abierto

[...]

Ahora, la ventana y la puerta

se entornan, y me entorno yo.

Entornado estoy, entornado

hacia aquello que no tornó. (77)

Curiously, the words “being partially open to the unreturned” are precisely the operation taking place at the level of language when it comes to loss. In stanzas such as the above, there is confidence that language does not demonstrate total opacity to the apprehension of past experiences or events. But these lines of hope are outnumbered by many other lines where loss is irretrievable, for example, “por donde huyó la vida” (94), where everything slips through the window or where the window looks out to a “vast



sadness” (“abierta a una inmensa desdicha”, 94), as if reflecting past desolation. The image of the window stands as a mirage, as a mirror that reflects emptiness. But the window is also an image of a life that refuses to contain loss for it rather falls into plain identification with it. When the latter occurs, the power of memory to restore is deprecated, memory is incapable of putting the smithereens of a fragmented life together: “corazón y memoria inútiles” (in “Cruelles pezuñas de los años idos” from *Las rubíyátas*, 371). The past emerges as a vacuum devouring the power of memory to retrieve. In the final stanza of the latter poem, loss is impervious, incapable of being penetrated, leaving no room for language to attempt understanding or explanation, as the negation implicit in the last line of the following stanza suggests:

La puerta y la ventana un día  
vino un algo que las cerró.  
La casa se quedó vacía.  
Yo sólo sabía decir no. (77)

And by this very same imperviousness death is made manifest by the refusal to accept loss as a component of the self. Instead, the poetic voice initiates a process of complete and total identification with loss, to the extent that the void of death is all-encompassing. Loss (part of the self) ends up being internalized as something beyond content that is confused with the container (the self), denoting the lack of a dividing line separating them. The imagery of the window and the door, especially the window, bespeak the poetic self’s longing to resolve the problematic of individuation/separation.

That is, its search to establish psychic borders suggests the lability of unsettling psychic frames. In “Magia” (*Las piedras*) the following lines illustrate this point:

Ahí fuera,  
en la noche estrellada,  
está mi vida, en forma  
de vacío y nostalgia. (81)

Death is also presented as a seed that grows into anonymity, which is congruent with the kind of fusion with loss the poetic voice seeks to perpetrate:

Apartando a brazadas tu juventud, te asomas  
al fondo de tu cuerpo y ves que allí, en lo oscuro,  
en lo callado, palpita una semilla  
de anonimato y de vejez. (110)

Death looms over feelings of illness and premature oldness. The poetic voice experiences death through its pathological relation to growing old: “En la piel de tu edad se ha instalado un eccema de desgana / como sobre un visillo un coágulo de sangre” (110). Note how the poetic voice refers to this psychic experience of death: “eccema de desgana” and “coágulo de sangre”. Both expressions, especially the terms “coágulo” and “eccema” are medical terms that here point out that a wound exists. It is apparently inflicted in the body but, nevertheless, directs attention to a psychic condition. The visibility of “eccema” and “coágulo” on the surface of a young and supposedly healthy skin and a curtain we imagine is an immaculate white lace curtain, respectively, call

attention to the inadequacy of the medium on which these wounds are displayed. They both suggest the overwhelming obviousness of a presence of enigmatic cause—how has a blood clot traveled to the surface of a curtain? —the very same existence of which denotes inappropriateness. The sense conveyed is that of an enigmatic and overwhelming presence that is taking over the self. In fact, it seems that the only movement occurring is along a pathway toward illness (madness) and death:

Por medio de esta oscura demencia se diría  
que me he sobrepasado, que soy mayor; ¿a dónde  
voy a llegar en este crecimiento?  
¿A la muerte? ¿Es acaso la muerte tan informe? (73)

This process of rapidly aging occurs almost as though the poetic voice were complicit with death, as if it had called upon death as to accelerate its arrival: “Hace ya tiempo que aspiras al reposo” (110). The latter line is ambiguous. It may indicate an “active” search for death as symbolized by “reposo”, or it might well suggest the hope of suffering being temporarily suspended—yet it might refer to the kind of eternal rest death brings—while “aspiras” points to a longing desire consciously nurtured by the poetic voice as illustrated by the expression of time “hace ya tiempo”. “Reposo” recalls the customary legend “rest in peace” engraved on tombstones. One cannot help but notice that “reposo” finds musical resonance in “responso”, a prayer offered to the “reposo” of

death.<sup>99</sup> It is baffling that the poetic voice appears to be invoking death with a word similar to one that connotes an act of prayer or mourning after death. Furthermore, “repose” echoes the emblematic resting postures—sitting and lying down. Interestingly enough, and according to Deleuze, in the works of both Beckett and Kafka sitting and lying down are modes of awaiting death (2003: 41).

In “Caballos funerales” (*Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche*) one of the lines reads: “Todo adiós es como un responso/ donde el cadáver participa en las letanías” (286). Hence, the poetic self’s experience of any separation as death and the tacit recognition that that which dies lives “in us” as is suggested by the image of a corpse participating in its own funeral song/prayer.

In duplicating itself into an Other, as illustrated by the use of the second pronominal person in the line, the poetic voice becomes at the same time witness and victim of its own annihilation when it summons death through a double movement of testifying to its own ending and serving as a catalyst for annihilation. On some occasions, the poetic self acts as a hopeless witness to its own destruction. It acts as a motionless and complacent viewer who can only see its own fragility as if it were someone else’s. In “Hermano marginal” the poetic voice indulges in self-deprecating memories of its childhood. In this poem the poetic voice acts as an illusionary omniscient narrator speaking of the infant it was, the person that it is now, and the person who it will be, with

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<sup>99</sup> Carlos Bousoño in his poem “Introducción a la muerte”, similarly intertwines “repose”, song and death: “Hay veces en que llegan a mi boca/ raros sonidos y a la muerte canto./ Allá en el esqueleto está escondida,/ dura, fija, aguardando./ Pero los hombres nunca saben./ Arriba hay quietos cielos vastos./ Tierra dorada, abajo, inmóvil./ Sol en la arena. Torsos, brazos./ Mas el hueso en el fondo de sus vidas/ (esa dureza de un futuro extraño)/ está tranquilo, porque luz no habita/ su funeral reposo milenario./ Yo sé lo mismo que los huesos saben,/ y miro, sin embargo,/ el viento puro, y, sin tristeza,/ suspiro en él, y algunas veces amo.” (1998: 81).

equal self-pity and despair. The temporal perspective is that of a hopeless present which sees the past and the future as equally hopeless. In this respect, the illusionary poetic voice speaks of a temporal division. The paralysis represented by the fusion of tenses in the emotional imagery of the voice renders superficial these arbitrary divisions, for it converts them into a sole stagnated time. In the last lines of the poem the voice seems to foresee the future, but, in reality, it is only a projective dimension of present remembering into the past and the future. It is, ultimately, the recalling from the perspective of emotions with the same tonal imprints, such as fragility and hopelessness, which unifies the temporal perspectives. And the omniscient narrator behaves as if it were situated transhistorically outside time:

Me escucho hervir con una atención tan filial;

[...]

igual que si yo fuera mi juguete pequeño del rincón,

mi navío de corcho que echo al estanque y que zozobra

porque tenía una vela de tela gruesa de remendar

de tela burda e incapaz como un niño, ahora

lo he recordado. [...]

hoy, esta cosa lejana e inasible que es hoy, hoy que considero

cómo han quedado inútiles todas mis papeletas de sorteo,

hoy te memoro, endeble criatura que fuiste [...]

tú, memorable hermano marginal, qué antiguamente observo

lo desvalido que irás por las ciudades con tus cuarentaitantos años de memoria  
[a la rastra

[...]

y me recordarás a mí como yo ahora te recuerdo. (37)

This hopelessness and sense of stasis of time is also closely related to the need to rest and feelings of fatigue. Apparently, tiredness, in contrast to exhaustion, allows one to witness one's own progressive decadence and stagnation. In a prose poem Luis Rosales asserts: "El cansancio es un don. [...] nos hace comprender que hay un exceso en todo, un descarrilamiento progresivo" and connects fatigue with memory: "El cansancio nos ata y nos desata, y hay personas que son antiguas ya en el momento mismo de nacer. Vienen desde el recuerdo. [...] Te juntan, te resumen dentro del orden del cansancio" (1981: 358). Deleuze links tiredness to memory too when he refers to "the tiredness that 'lies down', 'crawls' or 'gets stuck'. Tiredness affects action in all its states, whereas exhaustion only concerns an amnesiac witness" (1998: 195). A line which indicates the "active" witnessing and conforming—he who witnesses also partly re-shapes—of the poetic experience of annihilation is, for instance, "Apartando a brazadas tu juventud".

Throughout Grande's work in verse this summoning and witnessing of death is a clear feature of his poetic memory. More importantly, this feeling of mental death is rarely described within the framework of a narrative which would explain it and give it a sense. Death is, rather, a claustrophobic presence, a sort of suffocating spiderweb that configures the ways in which the central figure looks at the world, as if death were the only standpoint from which the poetic self perceives and remembers. In other words, the poem does not simply reflect on death. Death is rather lived in and through the poem as if

death referred here to an inextricably unconveyable experience one is unable to share. That is, experiences which are death-like because of their very same incommunicability. I shall refer to these experiences similar to and impregnated with death as the impossibility of communication or, in other words, as the silence accompanying melancholia and mourning.

Silence, however, can be interpreted in the poetry of Grande in several ways. In Grande's work the experience of silence is to be interpreted as death proper and mourning death, as impossibility of communicating, as catachresis—understood as lack of sense—and as forgetting, all of which relate to death. Death represents the great silence, whereas any other “category” of silence mentioned above that we find in Grande's work, ultimately harks back to the fundamental and definitive silence which is death. Yet these categories are distinguishable notwithstanding. As an example of silence understood as catachresis, in *Sobre el amor y la separación* Grande asserts: “¿Toda esa ausencia de sentido [...] no es la muerte? ¿Qué otra cosa es la muerte?” (1996: 188).

I shall now examine in detail the poems “Como una inundación”, “Premonición” and “Puesta de sol”, which belong to the collection *Música amenazada*. My analysis will show how each of these three poems rework in their own ways the concern of silence, highlighting death and unnameability as traits strictly related to silence. “Como una inundación” (119) can be described in a few words as a draining black hole, as the following reading aims to demonstrate. One of the main aspects of the topic of silence in the work of Grande is associated with oblivion and, more precisely, with the necessity of forgetting. “Edad de la carne” (111) illustrates this point. “Como una inundación” insists upon this dimension of silence, and, yet, it introduces a much more interesting dimension

of it—the impossibility of communication. Furthermore, in poems such as “La edad de la carne” and “En el fondo del vaso” (117) the mechanism of fleeing will be analyzed as a strategy to avoid working through trauma by a tacit refusal to produce a narrative of memory that would, ideally, disentangle emotions and their meaning. However, in “Como una inundación” flight constitutes an impossible task: “Hoy buscarás en vano / a tu dolor consuelo” (119). This poem re-enacts what is precisely the defining trait of trauma: a void or gap (in the poem, “agujero”) and even deems it impossible—“en vano”—to consider the alleviating mechanism of taking flight. The exclusion of the possibility of a way out in the form of flight, or in any other form, makes it a genuine illustration of what trauma involves: a state in which repetition of this very same hopelessness becomes the only recognizable feature throughout the poem. What is more, the impotence assumes the tone of being “absolute” to the extent that underlying it there can only be resignation to death and exclusion of hope. In “Como una inundación” (119-120) there is the recognition of trauma as a moment of death itself which is manifested in language through impotence and through dealing with the limits of language to express.

If a geometrical figure can be linked to this poem, that figure would be a circle. And let us note that, as Bachelard has written, “profound metaphysics is rooted in an implicit geometry” (1994: 212). Readers will be disappointed in their attempt to find something other than the formation of a self-enclosing boundary line whose trace is being constantly drawn and trodden from beginning to end. The poem is, indeed, a vicious circle and one that leads, inevitably, to nothingness. The driving force behind this void appears to be the words that have elicited it in the first place: the couple of short lines by Antonio Machado mentioned above: “Hoy buscarás en vano / a tu dolor consuelo”. These



lines contain the trajectory of a circle where one extreme is bound to encounter the other, causing them to become identical. These extremes that touch are the containing limits of a catastrophe (in the poem “un desastre”) that cannot be told, hence to name it amounts here to conveying the impossibility of the endeavour. The two Machadian lines act as a fatalistic omen that repeats over and over the very same idea of the impossibility of telling, and therefore, of gaining some comfort from understanding. Comfort is discarded in the face of an impenetrable absence that cannot be put into words. After the omen, and as in a whisper—the lines appear in brackets—the following words are muttered:

(Palabras que se acercan a tus calamidades  
y con piedad sombría las cubren de silencio;  
palabras que te suben el embozo hasta el cuello;  
palabras que te invitan a dormir las dos sienas  
y mamar, como un niño, de la teta del sueño). (119)

The reference to an infantile period of life does not seem to be arbitrary. For if the pre-Oedipal or pre-Symbolic Order is characterized by the absence of language, the inability of the poem to express results in the involution to this very same absence, that is, to a pre-Symbolic, unmetaphorical order in which the reality of the child is constituted not by words but by the double reality of its bodily union with the mother and sleep. In this stage of life the mouth of the child, another circle, is essentially a void that the person will learn to fill with words in the eventually inexorable absence of the mother (Abraham and Torok 1994). In “Como una inundación” it appears as if in the poem’s insistence upon the absence of words, the only remaining opportunity were the regressive return to

the maternal nourishment and the unconscious state of sleep. However, the lines above may well be indicating how close to death and nothingness the two phases of life to which the poem refers, the life of the infant and that of the old man, really are.

It is as if the very act of coming into existence, that is, the first extreme of life, were superseded by the final extreme, which is death, by the erasure of the path of life that lies in between. To be born is conveyed in the poem as synonymous with dying. The closeness among these two extremes, which constitutes a defining feature of the poetry of Grande, is similarly recognizable in the work of Leopoldo María Panero.<sup>100</sup> The following stanza, which is the third in the poem, seems to confirm that the latter hypothesis provides an illuminating insight into the meaning of the second stanza:

(Te ha rodeado la vida,  
o la muerte, o el tiempo  
como una inundación o como un terremoto,  
como una asfixia vasta o como un vasto ejército. (119)  
como una oscura cárcel,  
como un oscuro invierno;  
y estás inerme, estás perdido, estás sumado

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<sup>100</sup> From a very early stage of life, when he was apparently four years old, Panero began writing about death in his precocious poems. The best critic of Panero, Túa Blesa, asserts that: “Desde estos iniciales textos literarios se yergue la oscura sombra de la muerte, omnipresente, y, lo que es más significativo, la voz es la de un sujeto que ya ha atravesado el último río y habla desde la tumba, su reino es el de la muerte” (1995: 10). I believe that, even if less accentuated, Grande shares similar ways of making sense of his experience, in that Grande in his youthful twenties, similarly to Panero, already “habla desde la tumba, su reino es el de la muerte”.

encanecido; viejo). (119-120)

Lack of language, as equally represented by the pre-Symbolic Order of the child in the second stanza and an adult's inability to express himself in the third stanza, is in the two cases revealing of silence. The state of nothingness that the impossibility of communication represents cannot be rendered more vividly than through the images used: "inundación", "terremoto", "megaterio ciego". These are all images that convey a sense of catastrophe, although they fail to name or explain it. With regard to that catastrophe, metaphorically expressed by the natural phenomena, it seems unequivocally meaningful that the terms employed to describe its impact are associated with war: "asfixia vasta como un vasto ejército", "como una oscura cárcel" and "Miraron tu vivir como mira un disparo". And although there is no explicit reference to the Civil War, there are reasons to believe that lines such as the above echo the disasters of the Civil War as well as the impact they had on the poet's psyche.

The poet's experience of the Spanish Civil War is attached to his first memories as an infant. In "Generación" from *Taranto (homenaje a César Vallejo)*, Grande gives an account of a biographical story about how his mother, who worked as a nurse looking after wounded soldiers and civilians during the Civil War, would feed him with the "nourishment" of fear and tragedy, and he feels that this experience left a mark of death forever impressed upon his sensitivity, as a fatal destiny:

y después me ponía sus trágicos pezones en la boca,  
ebrios de obuses, apresurados de sobrevivencia casual,  
para que yo chupara mi destino

y cojeara luego con la niñez sin tronos. (50)

Although much of Grande's memory of the Civil War stems from experiences lived by his family, especially his parents—what is called “memoria diferida”—, scientists have also proved that the infant does record its own memories from the pram.<sup>101</sup>

Thus silence, besides symbolizing lack of language in both the pre-Symbolic Order and in the survivor's inability to express, is, furthermore, seemingly linked to historical and structural death. In the following lines, structural death is associated with silence and oblivion:

Ya el labio inferior tienes sumergido en la nada

Ya el olvido se acerca descomunal y lento

como una densa niebla

como un megaterio ciego

Hoy tienes cerrado ya el silencio. (120)

The poem “Premonición” similarly illustrates how the poetic voice conveys a certain muteness, combined with a specific way of making sense of the world from the viewpoint of death. Here, again, there is an element stressing the linking between the two extremes of life—coming into existence and dying simultaneously. Grande, citing Andreyev, calls coming into existence a “tránsito de lo oscuro a lo oscuro” (1996: 170). The charged symbol of a “sheet” can come to represent the infant's state of sleep and, yet, in the poem

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<sup>101</sup> According to a BBC documentary, “Prof. Joseph LeDoux at the Centre for Neuro Science in New York and author of *The Emotional Brain* supports [...] that it is possible to “remember” sensations or emotions [from infancy] in the adult body” (24-1-2007).

it also points to the old age, through the shroud's association with illness, a hospital and death. In fact, in the opening poem of the collection *Las piedras*, reminiscent of Quevedo's "pañales y mortaja", there are these four short lines that clarify further the latter point:

Una sábana es la doble  
definición de la esencia  
humana: campo con rosas;  
luego, campo con violetas. (56)

"Rosas" signals life and death through the association of red with blood and life, whereas "violetas" (black violets) reminds us of death. In the poem there is a reference to a "sala de espera", which, by analyzing the rest of the poem, can be taken metaphorically to be a hospital's waiting room. There is still another fundamental element in this poem: the window. The opening line of the poem reads as follows: "La gran ventana de la sala de espera" (121). According to Veronique Briaut, the window is an important recurrent object in the work of Grande (1988: 465). The window symbolizes the separation of two worlds. But such a division is only apparent, for what the window really comes to identify is the articulation between two elements, the self and the world, in that they have not achieved an autonomous or well differentiated status.<sup>102</sup> On the contrary, a fusion often occurs among the two. One of the lines in the poem "El ojo enorme de tu sepultura"

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<sup>102</sup> In *Mi música es para esta gente*, the window comes to represent the temptation to commit suicide: "madrugada y silencio, alcohol, tabaco, yo con una manta sobre los hombros; una ventana que se asoma a la calle oscura desde muy alto y que cada vez que la miro me reafirma en una convicción: por ahí no voy a tirarme jamás. No voy a matarme" (1975: 28).

(*Taranto*), literally says that the window bleeds. In this case the window can be interpreted as a weak ego suffering from too thin a demarcation between the “I” and the world that leaves the “I” with shaky grounds for its own definition. So, in reality, it is the ego suffering from a poor constitution which is bleeding. This point seems to be confirmed in the poem “Canción callada” from *Las piedras*, where the poetic voice identifies itself with a suffering window: “La puerta espera, la ventana sufre. / Yo soy la suma de las dos” (77).

In “Diana” we again find the window charged with significance. The voice tells us that the two realities separated by the window are in agreement. In this case, the external reality is a limping dog and the inner the voice’s life which also limps. There seems to be a projection of the inner into the external or a process of transference in which internal objects are described using external components:

Yo y mis caries, ventana,

nos hemos puesto a dialogar contigo, [...]

La noche me ha agitado dentro de una botella

[...] vengo

al cristal y reflexiono su ofensiva:

allá abajo, a la rastra,

cojea un perro lo mismo que un pasado, todo

concuerta, todo concuerta al sesgo de esa pata encogida. (45)

In “Premonición” the window also marks the separation between inside and outside. Bachelard has observed in general terms that the relationship between inside and outside is a dialectical one and in itself defining of being (1994: 211-31). “Inside” in this poem can be understood as inner, psychological reality, and “outside” represents the external world. What is more significant, inside and outside, owing to their shared signification, as will be explained, are not well differentiated in this poem, they almost blend into one another, in both the language and the mental state of the poetic voice. This is so because the main feature shared by inside and outside, inner and external reality, is their being embedded in silence. The inside of a hospital ward constitutes a metaphor, which implies the presence of illness and a willingness to cure it or the possibility of death. In the poem, outside is:

Un descampado inacabable, silencioso  
[...] páramo  
con su impávida muerte tan sólo interrumpida  
por el sollozo de algún caserón derruido. (121)

This description of the outside or external world can be taken as symbolizing the post-Civil War Spain—a moor where there is nothing but ruins—a reality to which the poem also alludes as “la gris o violeta realidad”. The term “páramo” takes its historical and cultural connotations from Franco’s Spain. In his analysis of how *Tiempo de silencio* by Luis Martín-Santos constitutes a metaphor of the dictatorship, Juan Luis Suárez Granda observes: “Hizo fortuna la expresión “páramo cultural”, empleada para referirse a España en las dos décadas que siguieron a 1939” (1986: 11). However, “páramo” can

also be taken in its political and/or metaphysical sense, that is, as a time or a place in which a void, a sense of hopelessness, and a lack of perspective on the horizon reigns.

The novelist Luis Mateo Díez observes: “«páramo» es la palabra más antigua que existe en castellano [...] Es un territorio que yo llamo del «espíritu áspero», de esos paisajes del alma y de la desolación donde parece que no hay nada” (in Hernández 2003: 495).<sup>103</sup> The inner Spain, namely, the psycho-sociological dimension of a people is metaphorized in the poem as a “sala de espera”, a place that involves a double meaning of hospital—something being wrong, illness—and stasis, that is, a situation where an outcome—or diagnosis—is awaited and several possibilities with regard to the future are considered.

Although not all the poems of Grande make it possible to propose a historical reading, some of them can be plausibly interpreted by turning to historical trauma.<sup>104</sup> In

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<sup>103</sup> The word “páramo” has a long literary tradition. Arturo Barea in the first book of his famous trilogy, *La forja*, describes a landscape—the author uses the words “campos de Castilla”, paradigmatic “páramos”—which is congruent in its desolation with the one found in Grande’s poem: “No hay árboles, no hay flores, la tierra está seca, dura y gris, raramente se ve la silueta de una casa [...] El efecto es como si estuvierais desnudos y sin defensa en las manos de Dios: o vuestro cerebro se amodorra y se embrutece en una resignación pasiva, o adquiere toda su potencia creadora, porque allí no hay nada que la distraiga y vuestro yo es un “yo” absoluto que se os aparece más claro y más transparente” (2008: 56-57). As occurs with the main character in Barea’s book, Arturo, the poetic voice in Grande’s poem also sees its creative mechanisms activated and reenforced by the surrounding landscape and experiments the same sense of fear and solitude it prompted in Arturo: “en los paisajes desolados de Castilla renacen miedos instintivos y amáis la soledad como una defensa” (2008: 57). The difference, however, is that in Grande’s poem the landscape is more occlusive, insofar as it highlights the agony of the poetic self.

<sup>104</sup> The problem with historical readings is that they may encounter both the critic’s and the author’s objections, in their claiming that genuine literature requires a reading on the more universal level of the human. For example, Julio Llamazares recognizes that Antonio Gamoneda was opposed to the historical reading of his “Descripción de la mentira”: “Sé que a Antonio Gamoneda, tan poco amigo de las simplificaciones, la lectura que algunos hicimos entonces de su libro no le agradaría mucho, aunque, con su buen estilo, nunca dijo nada en contra. Me refiero a esa lectura que identificaba un tanto simplistamente (era la época y era también nuestra ingenuidad) la mentira del título de su libro con la que este país había vivido durante años. A través de ella, versos como el que abre el texto -“El óxido se posó sobre mi lengua como el sabor



Grande's poems there is a vision of human life that overrides any historical interpretation, which can be demonstrated through the underlying coherence to the poems. However, such an interpretation may also be invested with historical detail, which the coherence implicit in a work not necessarily renders irrelevant. In contraposition, this thesis defends the idea that history impacts on the poet in ways that are difficult to predict but that these ways, nevertheless, are susceptible of being read historically.

Thus in "Premonición" the lack of resolution of trauma, that is, the act of being in permanent stasis, as if in a hospital's waiting room anticipating bad news, activates the mechanism of fantasy and the latter is precisely what the poem puts into effect in the following stanzas. Here fear is the emotion triggering fantasy. According to Judith Butler, fantasy is a projection of trauma and does not resolve it but, rather, repeats it. Hence fantasy is meant to lead to the same stasis. Sánchez-Pardo observes that "unconscious phantasy could thus be understood as some sort of structuring principle that gives shape to the individual's inner drama and transforms it into a particular and contingent

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de una desaparición / El olvido entró en mi lengua y no tuve otra conducta que el olvido / y no acepté otro valor que la imposibilidad"- cobraban a nuestros ojos un sentido muy directo, tan directo quizá como distinto al que el poeta había querido darles. Y no digamos aquellos otros que expresamente apuntaban: "Los que sabían gemir fueron amordazados por los que resistían la verdad, pero la verdad conducía a la traición / Algunos aprendieron a viajar con su mordaza y éstos fueron más hábiles y adivinaron un país donde la traición no es necesaria: un país sin verdad". Esto, para mí y para mis amigos, en aquel año de 1977, era toda una declaración. Recordaba todo eso mientras Antonio Gamoneda, con su educación antigua, leía su discurso sobre la poesía y la pobreza delante de un auditorio -el de los premios Cervantes, en Alcalá de Henares- la mayoría del cual seguramente no sabía quién era hasta esa mañana y me venía a la cabeza aquella lejana época en la que yo pensaba que la mentira era algo del pasado, algo que afortunadamente se terminaba por fin en este país. ¡Qué ingenuos éramos todos! ¡Qué infelices creyendo que aquel libro que leíamos como si fuera una revelación no era una visión del mundo, sino el epitafio de una época concreta!" (2007: 17). I agree that to limit the interpretation of a poem to its historical reading is reductive, but to ignore that poetry is conditioned by and assimilates in its own way history would necessarily mean to miss part of the significance of a work.

configuration” (2003: 214). In fact, the poem meets these expectations. The illusion created in the poem in the form of a man moving toward an eye that acts as a witness is a mirage of desolation, abandonment, pain and illness:

Acaso un vómito de miedo  
impulsó oscuramente a la compleja fantasía  
[...] y creíste imaginar, por sobre el descampado,  
el paso lento de un anciano  
tal vez borracho; al parecer, enfermo. (121)

Once again, we are presented with the same technique of a split self; although in this case the illusion or the thing projected forms part of the self, it is, in fact, a defining part of the self. Recipient (self) and content (its illusion) are deliberately confused here.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, this phantasmagorical human figure is perceived as a cognitive entity autonomous from the self. In other poems, like “Puesta de sol”, there is self-awareness of such a technique: “Tú eres ese hombre; una hora larga llevas / pensando tus propios movimientos, / pensando desde fuera, con piedad” (127). In fact, “Puesta de sol” is a twin poem in the sense that it complements “Premonición”, as will be seen later on. In “Premonición” fear provokes a reaction that results in an effect of disjunction. The outcome is, thus, a looking eye projecting an image perceived as independent from the mind that creates it. The poetic voice is at the same time the eye producing the vision and the vision itself, that is, it is the victim and the witness. The poem is the medium that

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<sup>105</sup> “The collapse of the container-contained relationship is at the core of melancholia” (Sánchez-Pardo 2003: 214).

permits the survivor to re-live and testify to its own re-living. The poetic voice projects itself into the fantasy of this vision, an abandoned and, perhaps, ill man: “Se diría que todos / le habían abandonado”. As the title of the poem suggests, there is also a premonition here in that the poet foresees his own death. In this sense this poem echoes César Vallejo’s lines from *Poemas humanos* “Me moriré en París con aguacero / un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo” (1985: 67). The vision is of an ill man who advances willingly and with haste toward death:

Ahora avanzaba  
tropezando con su sombría premura  
rodeada de vejez su voluntad y su historia  
Se iba hundiendo en el páramo, se perdía  
en la beneficosa noche  
que sepulta la batalla del mundo. (122)

It is impossible not to imagine that “la beneficosa noche” is death itself, with the looking eye witnessing how the phantasmagorical figure desires death. This Freudian “death drive” is represented by a feeble and aged will to live. What underlies this is the poetic voice’s desire to become united to the silent moor, to assimilate itself to the surrounding “páramo” of death and nothingness, a desire that can only be explained by the fact that, according to Butler, one ends up desiring one’s own subordination to that which surpasses oneself and, therefore, cannot control. In this case, this is necessarily an ultimate solution, a self-destructive tool to end subordination. In relation to this Sánchez-Pardo observes that Donald Meltzer “has compared unconscious phantasy to a theater in

which meaning and significance are first generated and only then projected onto the external world. The world is basically seen as empty and formless, a screen for the projection of unconscious phantasies” (2003: 214).

As anticipated above, “Puesta de sol” conveys the very same sense of stasis and mental death. The perspective of the speaker changes and, as a consequence, the tone of the poem is a more intimate one, verging on the confessional. While in “Premonición” there is a certain degree of aloofness implied in the use of the third person, in “Puesta de sol” we observe a self-conscious relationship with the “you”. The poetic voice recognizes itself as:

Hombre pálido, cumplida ya, remota  
la mitad de su edad; fuma y se asoma  
hacia la calle desvaída; sonrío solitario  
a este lado de la ventana, la famosa frontera. (127)

Here, once again, the meaning-laden symbol of a window acts as the frontier separating the inner and outer worlds. And, once again, this dividing object is a chimera, for the psychological reality is similar, if not identical, to what lies outside, or, to put it differently, the inner state is a projection onto the outer world. Whether this is so or, on the contrary, the external world reverberates into the inner, we cannot know. What seems clear, though, is that the scenes of the outer world are in harmonious rhythm with the emotional movements of the psyche. They are both descriptions of descending and distancing movements, processes as slow and arduous as acts of diving into self-cognition. The lines “el pensarse pensando” and “viendo tus propios movimientos /

pensando desde fuera, con piedad, / [...] pacientemente”, encounter parallel observations with what the speaker sees from the window: “y, allá al final, algunos caminantes pausados / se dejan agostar por la distancia”, “desciende el sol, lento como la muerte”, “la tarde casi enferma de tan lejana, / se sumerge en la noche / como un cuerpo harto ya de fatiga, en el mar, dulcemente” (127). The unfruitful act of seeing associated to movement reminds of Celan’s lines, “eyes-world blind”, “eyes submerged by words, unto blindness”, “eyes in the fissure of dying”, “Do not look any more—go!” (in Lacoue-Labarthe 1999: 101). Precisely because the “awareness” that the poetic voice sets out to achieve is not self-visible but rather blind, wordless, revealing what is in the self but without a name, a word unsaid. It is in fact a silent awareness or a lucid awareness of the silence that inhabits part of the empirical and poetic selves. The poet’s attempts to step back and “articulate” that silence founder on a crude realization: “Y comprendes, despacio, sin angustia, / que esta tarde no tienes realidad, pues a veces / la vida se coagula y se interrumpe” (127). There is no place for the “you”, it belongs nowhere—its space is that of exile. For where is the “you” if its place seems to be constantly receding or being interrupted? That looking out for oneself, a hide-and-seek game, described as “un juego de niños que tortura, paraliza, envejece” (127), is marked by a lack of destination that resonates in the distant passers-by who seem to be going nowhere (a place “misterioso y sombrío”) and have, in the meantime, grown emaciated. The “you” is never found in that paralysis and the stasis resulting from the failure to come up with a frame, a position, has the effect of an unending suffering—“y nada entonces / puedes hacer más que sufrir un sufrimiento”—and the mark of death—“y recordar, prolijamente, / algunos muertos que fueron desdichados” (127). Here, the recourse to memory is meaningful. It proves that

memory signifies the wall against which the poetic voice and the empirical self leans the weight of the lost object.

Nevertheless, on occasions the poetic voice's efforts to explore traumatic silences are rewarded with self-knowledge. This occurs in poems where there is more than mere witnessing and re-creation of trauma, as space is left for mourning.

#### **4.7 Fleeing: forgetting between necessity and (un) ethicality**

*[Art] is only an instrument for tracing lines of life, that is to say, all these real becomings that are not simply produced in art, all these active flights that do not consist in fleeing into art... but rather sweep it away with them toward the realms of the asignifying, the asubjective.*

(Deleuze and Guattari cited in *Critical and Clinical*)

*Las formas de la huida son numerosas como los minutos.*

(Grande, *Biografía*)

There are a number of poems that can be regarded as performative texts where the poetic self awakes to the painful reality of trauma and seeks the evasion of oblivion. In these poems we observe meditative tones leading to the meaningful realization of a hitherto hidden and silent wound. In other poems, the wound was already there in the

shape of endless pain but it was an experience of silence because meaning was lacking. It was loss without a discourse or explicative context that made historical trauma into structural absence.

When one awakes to trauma, mental flight constitutes an attempt at evasion. Yet, we may ask, evasion from what? In many senses *Música amenazada* is the book of awakening to trauma. One way of fleeing would be to seek a way out by the symbolic figuration of loss. Yet for Grande it is unethical to give closure to the death of the lost thing. It is important to maintain the remnants. This process can be called memorializing without finalizing.

Forgetting can be linked to the realms of the asignifying, the asubjective, and the act of fleeing to forgetting. However, oblivion, as one of the forms that memory adopts, permits the possibility of belated understanding. This is very different from the critique asserting that memory is useless because it forgets. Trauma might take the modality of fleeing and forgetting. There is an aspect of the transformation and deletion that memory operates in an individual's consciousness related to the necessity of forgetting. In this section I will explore the configurations of flight in Grande's poems. What role does the destruction of memories occupy in his oeuvre? Does he consider that some memories are better to forget? Or, notwithstanding the pain, does he defend memory? What do insomnia and sleep have to do with forgetting? What are the literary techniques he uses to approach oblivion? I shall also explore how memory is encoded in the desire to flee.

In Grande's poetry fleeing constitutes a mechanism that often follows a two-phase process of self-reflection. In the poems that have fleeing as a theme or as the axis around which the poem is constructed, a common pattern is found. The structure of writing

reveals two identifiable stages preceding what can be called the poetic voice's drive to escape. Such a structure tends to obey an order. First, the poetic voice passively experiences its subjection to the power of certain feelings, frequently tiredness and apathy, which demonstrates lack of vigour toward life or a hidden drive to death. Shortly afterwards, we find the poetic voice wishing to transcend the merely pragmatic experience of subordination to these powerful mental conditions and wanting to take a more critical and reflexive stance. It is as though, by adopting the structure of an implicit dialogue—or a dialectical monologue—with itself, that is, through a technique that splits the poetic voice into an analyzer “I” and an analysand “You”, the poetic voice undertakes the endeavour of curing itself from its *maladie*. Felman observes that: “The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness; reconstitutes the internal ‘thou,’ and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself” (1992: 85). It is significant that in “Otra figura del insomnio” the poetic voice compares this process of self-reflection, of testifying to itself with a harvest. “I am the harvesting tool and the harvest itself”, the poetic voice comes to assert: “esa cosecha misteriosa, de la que soy la/ espiga y la hoz y el cercén y el rastrojo” (285).

Nevertheless, the relationship between the poetic voice and the “You” which it addresses is not specular, it is not one of identity, but, rather, a relationship with an unknown Other. In Deleuze (1998) proposes that the writer act not as a patient but, rather, as a doctor of himself, that is, as a symptomatologist.<sup>106</sup> Yet, as will be seen with

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<sup>106</sup> Daniel W. Smith states that “The fundamental idea behind Deleuze’s ‘critique et clinique’ project is that authors and artists, like doctors and clinicians, can themselves be seen as profound symptomatologists” (in Deleuze 1998: xvii).



regard to Grande's poetry, the symptoms that a given work of art may isolate, also point to a particular mode of existence that can be extended to a whole period or civilization. Nietzsche was the first to put forward the idea that "artists and philosophers are physiologists, 'physicians of culture'" (cited in Deleuze 1998: xvii).

Thus the second stage of what has been referred to as a two-phase process in much of Grande's poetry, is the stage in which the poetic voice finds itself in a state of alert with regard to its own condition, which permits the poetic voice to attempt to explain its own symptomatology. In this latter stage the poetic voice's experience is not reduced to its subordination to certain feelings related to its testifying to an inner or external reality; furthermore, it embarks on a process of recognizing the whole history of these feelings.<sup>107</sup> Thus the poetic voice is not a mere witness (as Lapuerta Amigo suggests: "mero narrador-testigo de una situación que le parece injusta" [1994: 76]) but a witness that is at the same time, to say it with Beatriz Sarlo, "productor y analista" (2005: 100). The act of fleeing as a mechanism that apparently concludes this two-phase process consists in passing from the subjection to feelings to acquiring conscience of their powerful force. On the one hand, the act of fleeing usually appears as a poetic process caught up in the contradictory opposition between memory and forgetting, which results in the poem becoming a symbolic refuge or the exercise of introducing a pause in the impossible memory/forgetting binomy and in front of the dissolution of the self that the act of forgetting entails. On the other hand, in other poems, the poetic voice actively reflects on fleeing itself, as shall be seen further on.

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<sup>107</sup> Marina has studied feelings as forces displaying a history behind them. See (1996) and (1999).

“La edad de la carne” re-enacts a state of mind that is described with the terms of “desgana” (apathy), “cansancio” (tiredness) and “hastío” (boredom):

Cuando medita en su desgana suntuosa,  
en su certeza sideral de cansancio,  
en su sueldo de hastío y temor. (111)

The poem is written in the third person, a distancing technique that will precisely allow for the objectifying of a state of mind. The verb “meditar” (to reflect upon) acts as the key unlocking entry to a more conscious realm of the mind: “cuando medita en esa cerradura / enmohecida de miseria y espanto”. “Meditar”, thus, constitutes the turning point from which feelings of apathy, tiredness, and boredom will no longer be passively felt, that is, silently repressed, but actively thought. The fact that “meditar” is also regarded as a “light bulb” (“cuando se enciende en él esa rara bombilla”), that is, as that which makes it possible to illuminate in order to decipher the poetic voice’s condition, seems to reinforce the latter point. In this sense the poetic voice incurs in the recognition of two inextricable realities. The double labour of erasure and inscription of history takes place in the body. The title of the poem, “La edad de la carne”, may be pointing precisely to history being made “age” in the body—although its signification is ambivalent as it may also refer to the contradiction of experiencing death at an early age in life. The latter is conveyed, for instance, in lines where the poetic voice uses the opposing “tarde” and “mañana” to express this idea:

Comprendías entonces durante esta mañana

—parecida a una tarde muy vieja, muy inerte—

[...]

Comprendías entonces que estabas muerto, vivo

para morir, muerto en camino, vivo decadente. (72)

Furthermore, the poetic voice's meditative posture is not one of resignation in the face of subordination to feelings but one of recognition of what lies beneath, and, therefore, it is one of resistance. The poem suggests the presence of a force seeking to traverse the superficial membrane of feelings in order to unravel their significance. Thus there is an attempt to decode memories encoded in emotions and inscribed in the body. This travail of carving into deepness leads to seeing the tip of an iceberg, whose salient features are repression, violence, illness, poverty (material and spiritual), terror, and a general sense of the world's diminishing:

Cuando medita en esa cerradura

enmohecida de miseria y espanto,

cuando se enciende en él esa rara bombilla

con que alumbra la casa de la vida

y ve en ella un cubil bárbaramente amenazado

y ojeroso de historia imperfecta,

de desamor y de coágulos,

de aborto de generaciones y de ecuménica ruina. (111)

As soon as the tip of the iceberg is disclosed, how does the poetic voice react to the sight of it? By fleeing from this terrifying scene: “fugarse desde el miedo hasta el olvido” (111). This visceral reaction consists in consciously perpetrating an act of forgetfulness. Oblivion may be a willed act and a justifiable one when memories are too harsh to work through. However, the way this idea is conveyed in the poem makes oblivion appear not as an act of automatic self-protection, but rather as an act of assassination against memory and, also, against the existence of the self: “perpetrar actos orientados hasta el desnacimiento / asesinar su olvido hasta que sangre olvido” (111). Thus behind the poetic voice’s willingness to forget there seems to be far more than a melancholic disposition attached to trauma. It more significantly appears to be suggesting a belief in the imperatively important role of memory in the constitution of the self. When one forgets, according to the latter line, one perpetrates acts oriented toward the dissolution of the self. Thus, only a symbolic “act of assassination” could make the lost object and the unresolved object of trauma disappear and, therefore, eliminate suffering. But the idea of oblivion is presented with connotations of homicide. Furthermore, fleeing as loss of memory or deliberate abandonment of memory poses for the poet a moral problem. An integral part of the ethics of memory in Grande’s work is an overt attitude against forgetting: “la indignación contra el olvido” (1996: 175). Hence, the ideas attached to the act of fleeing oscillate among two extremes, the necessity to forget and how costly the consequences of such forgetfulness are in terms of both loss of identify of the self and in relation to ethics.

“La edad de la carne”, furthermore, opposes a voluntary act of silencing terror and a desire to put it to death (here, the lost object of trauma), to the implicit recognition that

overcoming terror would paradoxically have to entail an act of memory that is not merely a traumatic repetition of terror. Yet it is this very same act of memory that desire in the poem would like to annihilate. Thus this poem stresses the contradictory nature of memory, as it conveys the inexorable but ineffective necessities of both forgetting and remembering. The reference to the female body and to the peace it brings in its identification with a resting cave, a refuge or a shelter (“caverna de descanso”) may symbolize an interruption of this self-destructive process of having to remember what is too painful to be remembered and, therefore, deserves to cease to be assisted by the oxygen of memory. The poem re-enacts and resolves this contradiction by emerging as the symbolic “caverna de descanso” where the two contending desires are made to co-exist and neutralize one another—one cannot voluntarily assassinate memory nor can memory be completely silenced, the poem becoming the site of eternal flight. Ultimately, and for the latter reason, the poem offers no solution to the re-enactment of trauma, irrespective of its attempts to come up with a narrative frame that would put an end to the introjection of traumatic repetition. The only escape is a temporary pause stemming from this act of fleeing to the body of the poem, which can, nevertheless, be seen as a sad metaphor whereby healing memory may be, in some cases, nothing but utopia. The poem represents the dramatic scenario in which one’s personal memory might be bound to remain subject-less, asignified, with the poetic voice’s only ability to escape to the asubjective flesh of the poem, leading to the poem’s final assertion: “comprende en silencio que se inunda en la carne / igual que el torturado se refugia en su ay tumultuoso” (112).

In “En el fondo del vaso” the same technique of splitting the subject is used in order to facilitate the enquiry into the deeper layers of the self, that is, as a means for self-knowledge and self-recognition. Splitting the self is, nevertheless, a useless strategy for true evasion, where the impossibility of fleeing (becoming other) lurks. In other words, this self-analytic tool facilitates self-knowledge (of trauma) but it does not permit the poet to transcend it. Nevertheless, it seems important for the poetic voice to maintain lucidity, so even when it seeks to escape, it knows that “pero tengo que volver a volver” (456), a form of recognition of the apparently irremediable nature of trauma. In one of his essays, Grande writes: “en nosotros existen constantes, y ellas nos dejan dividirnos pero no nos consienten un cambio: algo nuevo sin la memoria del gusano, ni siquiera sin la memoria de la larva [...] ¿No hay escape?” (1975c: 28).

What “En el fondo del vaso” underscores is a willingness to resist self-delusion or self-denial. The “posos del vaso” (sediments) underlie the effort of travelling from the surface to the bottom to discover what lies beneath. The structure generated in “La edad de la carne” is also used in “En el fondo del vaso”. First, a phase of subjection to feeling; second, a phase of meditation on subordination that leads to flight. What is different in this poem is that there is a double meditation or meta-meditation on the act of fleeing itself. “En el fondo del vaso” is one of the few poems, throughout Grande’s work in verse, where the poetic voice raises the problems posed by the act of fleeing by engaging in a reflection upon its ethical consequences. While in “Edad de la carne” fleeing is associated with a necessary (psychological) refuge, in this poem it constitutes a farce:

A veces, sin embargo,

a ese entrañable, a ese entrañado  
se le desgajan las raíces, siente  
mortal deseo de huir, abandonar  
su casa, su mujer, su proyecto; abandonaros;  
[...]: necesita  
darle forma a los posos  
del vaso que se bebe a solas en la noche.

En instantes así, vuestro amigo de tantos años  
os es desconocido, es decir, monstruoso.  
En instantes así, la verdad que construye  
con vosotros, acto tras acto, lo deslumbra  
con el esplendor agrio de la farsa. (117)

There is an explicit recognition that fleeing is a stimulus, a drive, like the death drive, which leads to the poetic voice's questioning whether fleeing should be resisted:

La libertad, ¿consiste  
en resistir esas tormentas  
pensando desesperadamente que sólo son mentira?  
La libertad, ¿consiste en apartar esos estímulos  
como quien se aprieta una herida para expulsar la pus? (118)

To summarize, the poems analyzed are frequently reflective and self-reflective on the psychological mechanisms they put into effect. They are caught in a stand-off between re-enactment and awareness, and therefore, they constitute an attempt at the resolution of trauma. Thus, arguably, by associating the themes of trauma and freedom they offer a reflection on the consequences of trauma not only from the perspective of health but, also, from the perspective of ethics.

## **5. Conclusion to the thesis**

Grande's work reflects upon and offers insightful illustrations of cognitive processes associated with memory, at times overtly and other times unwittingly. His ideas on memory differ from common conceptualizations of the theme in the work of fellow poets from his and subsequent generations. Unlike Grande, these poets thought that memory was faulty because it did not deliver "copies" of the past. Grande, rather, conveys in his work the idea that the nature of memory is necessarily pliable, and radically rejects the notion that memory is a defective medium for the retrieval of past events. He rather supports the view that memory's main function is not the search for accuracy but the need to work through the past and elaborate understanding, which stands as a drastically diverse task. In his work, memory is construed as a "biological creature" that follows adaptational needs.

More significantly, Grande's work shows us that this crucial trait of memory, its being modifiable, constitutes the condition of the possibility for an ethics of the self and the very grounds on which the fashioning of the self is founded. His work indirectly



develops a relatively consistent “theory” of memory, even if it does so in a contingent manner. For Grande never thought of memory as a “programmatically” element structuring his work.<sup>108</sup> He rather conceived of it in a rather intuitive and unplanned fashion (that is, he did not mean to appropriate the philosopher’s posture or the historian’s work).

While for many of Grande’s contemporaries the exercise of memory was a frustrating experience, as they yielded to a long tradition whereby poetical memory is mendacious, Grande’s work restores credit to memory and even endows it with an importance that is in accordance with the prominent role it has acquired, as the impetus gained by Memory and Trauma Studies proves. His work demonstrates that poetry in its own unpredictable and uncertain way can also serve to pursue a certain truth.

Grande’s poetry equally relates to memory in the recalling of traumatic events. In this respect his work shows that traumatic experiences may resist interpretation and assimilation into memory’s normal cognitive processes; yet, they are traceable in recurrent structures of writing and patterns through which the poet makes sense of the world. Trauma manifests itself in Grande’s work by constantly pointing to the existence of a gap, readable in the labour of suffering that his poetry ceaselessly evokes. Such a void underlies the presence of irretrievable loss or losses (it is impossible to know how many) and leads to unelaborated, hyperbolic pain and sadness. This sadness is pervasive and can be said to constitute the nuclear feature of the poetic voice. Recurrent emotions of pain point to sensory (cognitively barred) *memories*, that is, they speak of trauma. This

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<sup>108</sup> In conversation with Grande (16-3-2007). Grande’s theory is based *a priori* on instinct and, to a great extent, *a posteriori* on his own experience with and understanding of the phenomenon of flamenco.

excessive pain is visibly suffocating and jeopardizes life in the poems but we are excluded from the knowledge of whence suffering comes. We, as readers, can only testify to it, as vicarious witnesses.

Trauma's survival is dependent on language. The latter is behind Grande's distinct attitude toward the Spanish crisis of the word. The Spanish post-Civil War poets who yielded to the modern critique of language understood the crisis of the word mainly from a formalist view of language, that is, they made of the inability of language to express an aesthetic end in itself, a rhetorical technique, without reflecting on the modern causes for such a failure to communicate. The latter emboldens me to think that the Spanish crisis of the word was grounded on a certain conception of art for which silence was not a *symptom*, but rather a new aesthetic trend which failed to see or chose to ignore the fact that the European version of this crisis, from which it took inspiration, derived from the emergence of a new kind of inhumanity; an inhumanity that more than anything else required linguistic rendering in order to be confronted. Such an ethical concern cannot be said to have been totally absent in the Spanish poetry of the second half of the twentieth century, but it was reductively—if not poorly—theorized and thought out. It was enshrined in the literary debate around social versus culturalist poetry. The level and quality of such a debate did not reach philosophical depths, as it did not embark on a reflection on the human condition. As a consequence, the silence inherent to this new inhumanity was hardly discussed. And the question of silence in poetry was drastically reduced to a mystical-religious issue or to a mere rhetorical device to “purify” poetry and, often, as a kind of historical continuation to Juan Ramón Jiménez's undertaking of “*poesía pura*”.

However, rhetorical techniques are linked to history and subject to fashion, and they normally serve an end. This is an altogether different matter from the idea of a historical and transhistorical nothingness that inhabits the self. In other words, there were dimensions of the question of silence that the poets who adhered to the poetics of silence (and their critics) did not incorporate in their discourse. Thus the poetics of silence, rather homogeneously and intransigently, disavowed an important aspect of language with respect to silence. Silence is that which cannot be brought into existence through words but only suggested by them. Given that silence and language are inextricably connected, there is no need to put emphasis on what is already irreducible. However, language can help to shelter from the reality of silence and this is what the poetics of silence tended to overlook. Language is indeed a hopeful tool for restoring life where death has taken over.

The latter becomes clear if we think of trauma in its “kinship” with madness. In both experiences silence is locked up inside the suffering self. According to Felman, who reformulates Derrida, “the very status of language is that of a break with madness, of a protective strategy, of a difference by which madness is deferred, put off [...] far from being a historical accident, the exclusion of madness is the general condition and the constitutive foundation of the very enterprise of speech” (2003: 44). This, applied to the Spanish crisis of the word and to the poetics of silence, puts things in a radically different perspective.

As we have seen, to affirm that poetry emerges from silence and is irreducibly haunted by silence is an *economical* discourse, in the sense of being “essential to the

economy” of poetry.<sup>109</sup> That is, it is a necessary predicament. Now, the conversion of silence into a technique of poetic expression, an “end” in itself and for its own sake, stands as an intrinsically different undertaking. Such a pursuit implicitly negates the premise that language wards off the psychic damage that silence, understood as an experience of the psyche, inflicts on the self. It is in this sense that Grande’s poetry instantiates another way of seeing silence; a new perspective that lays bare the inescapable connection between poetry and the complex psychic dimensions it seeks (and fails) to articulate fully.

Grande’s work offers illuminating insights into the nature of traumatic memory by showing how the poem itself reconstructs the violence and deadly poison of the catastrophic event. Ultimately, it shows the extent to which epistemology engages with literature. And it points to writing as a form of contributing to the understanding (however limited) of devastating experiences surrounded by silence, at the level of the psyche but, also, on a collective level, even if the interconnections between individual and collective traumas, as this thesis has tried to show, are very difficult to determine. Where does the individual trauma end and the collective trauma begin? How does the silence proper to personal trauma intermingle with that imposed historically on individuals? For, to complicate things further, there are the institutional forces that impose practices of memory and merge individual and collective representations and manifestations of trauma, as we have seen to be the case with the control over the use of memory under the dictatorship.

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<sup>109</sup> Derrida talks about “economical” as that which is “essential”, in opposition to “historical”. (See Felman 2003: 44).

In Grande's work the state of melancholia, alternated with states of mourning, entails both a rupture and a confusion with the external world (there is not appropriate integration of the internal and the external, necessary to survive)—inevitable under the conditions of inner exile imposed on the “defeated” by the regime —, enshrined in the poetic voice's inability to protect itself against that which casts it outside the shelter of the symbolic. The battle against silence constitutes a struggle to come up with ways to keep at bay the “blankness of asymbolia”, in Kristeva's words, through attempted linguistic elaborations of the void. But melancholia is first and foremost an emotional strategy that seeks protection, as Sánchez-Pardo observes: “[Melancholia] can be read, though, as a form of active resistance to the dispossession that the social as a devouring agent perpetrates upon the subject” (2003: 6). In Abraham and Torok's words, “melancholic mourning is often the subject's last chance at narcissistic restoration” (1994:137). That is, the social, understood as that which strips the self of a voice, which silences it, is counterbalanced by melancholy. Melancholy is irreducibly attached to Grande's losses which permeate his poetry in elusive, disturbing and haunting ways. The reaction to these irrecoverable losses is, in the first place, one of hyperbolic pain and incurable sadness. But Grande's inaccessibility to the lost Object and the conflating in his work of historical loss and structural absence makes it more difficult for the poetic voice to recognize sadness as its own, and so it prevents mourning from reaching a conclusion.

I believe that the poetic voice's misrecognition of losses and its conviction of their being unmasterable go hand in hand with its emotional attachment to sadness. Awareness of this *maladie*, sadness, does not imply resolution. For attempted representations of sadness evoke something of greater vastness and deprivation. And yet the poetic voice

falls short with words to avow the past. It relinquishes at the outset any chances of gaining access to them: “Mas no puedo volver”, the poetic voice asserts, as though no interpretation of the past were possible, or there were no paths leading to understanding. Sadness is seen as something compact, without fissures, embedded in a totalizing and universalizing discourse on pain, a madness only counteracted and mitigated by another discourse that splits the poetic self into trying to analyze this very madness. The use of metaphors such as the “círculo” and the “noría” precisely convey the claustrophobic movement in circles. So, the obsession with the past, the libidinal attachment to sadness is in correlation with an exploration of the enclosed territory of the unknown, as represented by the opacity of trauma. Often in his poetry, the inability to elaborate a sadness and a pain that is devoid of content negates the possibility of turning silence into memory. And this is the first striking contradiction emerging from the opposition between Grande’s theorizing of memory, which is a lucid account of the phenomenon, and the practices of memory of Grande’s poetic voice. Rather than keeping memory alive, the reaction produced by the poetic voice has the result of assuring silence to persist. Grande’s voice melancholically loves his trauma, his wound: “¿Se me creería si asegurase solemnemente que incluso llegué a amar a la momia? [...] yo la amaba, por supuesto, con el cerebro y con los sentimientos” (1975<sup>a</sup>: 60). Thus when the poetic voice states “Vieja bestia del sufrimiento, es ya casi majestuosa tu ritual obstinación. Remoto, incomprensible, como mi adolescencia, venía el dolor” (261), one must interpret this legitimate questioning, equally, as a certain unwillingness to question the self. This attachment to pain (notwithstanding the existence of a split self that both bears witness to trauma and attempts a deconstruction of it) forms part of the difficulty inherent in trauma but it also

has to do with an ethical disposition (apart from a survival mechanism) to adopt the voice of the vanquished and drowned:

A veces

la alegría parece una calumnia,

y esas veces impiden a la herida cerrarse

y a la convalecencia afluir a la salud. (108)

And yet, paradoxically, it is precisely through this engagement with pain and loss in the representations of death that the poetic voice aims to create the possibility of life out of the destructive and paralyzing power of trauma. Its undertaking is a search for survival.

Ultimately, the poem is the symbolic site whereby an agonizing memory is confined and the poetic voice's trauma is spoken. The sites of memory in Grande's work are emotionally charged places or indefinite sites—sometimes only denoted by a vague adverb of location—that are the only possible frames in which silence can speak. For it might be said that they are non-places, places of no memory which point to the poetic voice's difficulty in conveying an inexpressible reality. They configure a psychic space which acts as a container or dike to prevent the continuous hemorrhage of the wound of trauma from bleeding to death. It is, indeed, a question of life or death. In *Las calles* Grande confesses “también mi vida me ha hecho escritor, y de manera decisiva. Por lo menos, algunas zonas de mi vida no podían dar otro resultado que el suicidio o el arte” (1980: 14).

There can be no doubts about the poetic voice's will, need and desire to communicate, and his entire *oeuvre* proves it. However, there is an inner struggle to

define that which is urging to be conveyed, an excess which is the very essence of the silence. Such a tension is visible in a pervasive, incommunicable surplus of meaning which translates into a hyperbolic use of language and into aesthetic patterns attempting an escape through language, while pushing the poetic self into the labyrinth of its own contradictions. The poetic voice shelters and unshelters itself in language. Language protects it as much as it discloses threatening psychic material. Whilst also being the means for dealing with silence, words point inevitably to something never quite transmitted. Nevertheless, the struggle never results in the defeat of language. On the contrary, language turns out to be the only reliable defense mechanism that keeps suicide at bay. Thus words become the ultimate and definitive possibility of memory for the poet, the impossible and yet consoling place whither the poetic voice attempts an escape or where it painstakingly seeks to break out of silence. In this respect Grande's poetry fluctuates between the testimony of catastrophe, a voice that speaks from the locus of trauma, and the knowledge that the voice, wanting to speak from *outside* this locus, derives from attempted dissections of trauma. Thus the poetic voice is simultaneously, as Beatriz Sarlo puts it, "productor y analista" (2005: 100). In other words, Grande's work is irremediably caught between inescapable melancholia and its working through, two apparently irreconcilable attitudes which, nevertheless, coexist in a difficult tension.

Melancholia leads to the traumatic introjection of history, in which death becomes the only possibility of giving an account of the self, eviscerating the poetic self's capacity for self-recognition. It destroys the possibility of a genuine working through of the past in therapeutic forms, and so it entices the voice into becoming its own murderer. "I am a lethal machine", says the poetic voice. In other words, the melancholic poetic voice does



not offer resistance to death through symbolic figuration, in order to survive loss, but rather writes its own compulsive repetition. Such a scenario of self-punishment undermines the recollection of the past in order to make sense of traumatic memory in narrative terms. And yet it is by virtue of this traumatic silence represented by the memory of death, paradoxically, that the possibility of witnessing and, along with it, the condition of survival, are established. For if the necessity to mourn rests upon the impossibility of a complete interiorization of death, the response that this situation elicits is one by which an ethical imperative is communicated. As much as we cannot cease to mourn the death of others, our relation to this process requires that we never cease in the *impossible* enterprise of letting alterity *speak*, and in the dialogue with death, as a central part of what it means to be human. Furthermore, it is in this firmly established emotional link with death that the poetic voice's own immortality rests.

To conclude, Grande's work is not limited to giving an account of the tribulations of the poetic voice. More significantly, it proposes to understand what it means to be human under catastrophe, even if this knowledge consists of the recognition of the extreme difficulty—and even failure—of such an undertaking. If there is one thing Grande's work puts into play, it is precisely the idea that poetry is not so much about representation or *mirror* reflection as it is about a ruminative memory. A kind of rumination (even a way of whining) that attempts to apprehend what is most profound (his personal losses and those traumas tied up with the upheavals of his time, which became enmeshed in his own) and in so doing, it establishes the means for survival, as it poses active resistance to (and contains) the obscure psychic forces that drag the poetic self into an abyss of despair. In his poetry, elaborating understanding (even if precarious) of traumatic memory and the

role art plays in it, sets into motion a process of impossible foreclosing. Ultimately, his reflections on memory and trauma consist of an endless rumination to arrive at the core of what the act of writing poetry itself means (beyond the mere study of a tradition) and the recognition that such a meaning can never be fully conquered: “Lo que pasaba con el arte de la poesía es que ni siquiera entendiéndola era posible entenderla del todo” (2003: 197).

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