

A COMPARISON BETWEEN EXISTENTIALIST POST-WAR POETRY FROM SPAIN AND FROM SOUTH KOREA

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0. Existentialism in the poetic panorama of the Spanish and the Korean post-war

In the Korean case, post-war literature covers a period not clearly defined, that in the most extensive case would include from the end of the Second World War to the mid 1960's, but that usually restricts to the decade of the 1950's. Thus, that denomination encompasses both the post-war poetry itself and the war poetry. (Song, 1996: 9). Nevertheless it can be stated that poetry written during the Korean War introduces its own characteristics, which differentiate it clearly from that of the post-war, as it happens also in the Spanish case. In the first place, not everyone that writes such poetry were poets, but there are a lot of soldiers that practice it with a wide range of intentions, reason why it betrays a strong tendency to monotony, since it is a poetry that follows a specific object, whether it is the aim to instil the spirit of fight, to make propaganda of anti-communism ideology, or, to the contrary, denounce the inhumanity of war and witness its horrors (Jang, 1997: 3).

That is the reason why it would be more interesting to exclusively focus on the poetry produced during the end of the war. The artistic generation of this period are in fact the writers of the war, since their works, from any standpoint, cannot be utterly understood without the traumatic experience of war, which impresses upon them a characteristic zeal (Song, 1996: 9). This specific aspect of the period could be denominated as "existentialism" or "existential anguish", because the anguish produced by the experience of war, the desperation before the vision of so many dead, and the scepticism produced by questioning the valour in so many horrors lived at the war, invite in a natural way to ask oneself about the meaning of existence and to feel anguish before the idea of one's own death. That, together with the influence of existential thinking,¹ both philosophic and literary, arrived from the West, and helps define such a current within post-war Korean literature, even though the truth is that the poetry known as "existentialism" does not present a formalization of its own, but it is settled on another sort of poetry, whether it is the avant-garde current or that known as "participation in the reality", with a more realistic mood, which in a sense provides its "form" to be filled with existential content.² It is termed thus because the basic characteristic of the poets from this period is their awareness of an existential crisis, reason why existentialism in Korea is more than a literary current, a current of thinking, which appears in many of the poems from such period, and take different shapes depending on the author. Of course, not every poet accepted those foreign ideas or agreed with them, but the disaster and the ruin that this war between brothers meant had an impact on most of the Korean people, their writers and poets included, of course. That is the reason why, even

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1 | Existentialism is a philosophic current that originated in the 21st century and lasted until the second half of the 20th century, but the popularization of the term "existentialism", especially after the Second World War, more than to make reference to a specific philosophic current, was identified with a series of heterogenic currents of thinking that took place mainly in the 40's and 50's in Europe. It is, thus, a widely-used term not limited to philosophy, but that covers literature, cinema, politics, etc., so it can be considered more a vital attitude than a philosophic current with clear and delimited intellectual theses.

2 | Although Korean post-war poetry presents numerous faces that can eventually coexist within one author, from the formal point of view most of the authors coincide to divide the poetry from this period in two main currents: the traditional one and the avant-garde, to which is common to add a third, the poetry of "participation of the reality". The first would be the one produced by those writers who wanted to maintain the rhythm of traditional poetry or to treat the themes related to nature; the second one appeared as a response to traditionalism, criticized basically because of their flight from reality and their intent to be sheltered exclusively in themselves, ignoring the sad circumstances surrounding them. The avant-garde also considered that ignoring western influences was not possible anymore, so they adopted it in their poetry. Finally, the third group appeared after the other two, about mid or the end of the decade of the 50's, to show a renewed interest in participating in reality and a strong inclination to search a way to overcome in a positive manner the tragic circumstances of war and post-war.

in some poems of the traditionalist current that echo the “existential anguish” (Han, 1991: 80), it can be stated that the traditionalist current is the more representative of the whole poetry of the decade of the 1950’s (Kim, 1999: 141), although it is usually formalized as an avant-garde.

It is possible to highlight that, in fact, existentialism was never introduced at a deep level in Korea, but it always moved within the journalistic field, where the Western writers at hand were more usually Sartre, Heidegger, and Camus (Kim, 1999: 9). The influence of Sartre was especially noticeable within that genre and in prose, while that of Heidegger was more concentrated in poetry, probably because of the interest expressed by him in language and its creative capacity. In any case, although existentialism had been already introduced in the decade of the 1940’s, it was not until the post-war that writers started to show a genuine interest for this kind of Western thinking; an interest in which, as it have been said before, the war played an essential role. Sartre and his humanism especially had a very good reception, since if for Heidegger man is inclined to the nothingness, without a specific aim, Sartre proposes the involvement in Society and bets for action. Nevertheless, after he was besmirched for his defence of communism, the interest he had awakened was, little by little, diverted to Camus, especially from the moment the latter won the Noble prize.

In spite of the divergences presented by the different existentialist authors, it is possible to find a series of basic concepts usually used by many of them, and which are, in turn, the one’s mostly compiled by Korean poets from the period, since they, as it is pointed out by Mub Hye Won, search in the existentialist thinking a tool that allows them to re-establish the loss of social values and to find solutions to the problems that appeared during the post-war (Mun, 1996: 4). Thus, concepts as the idea of the absurd, desperation and anguish, the look of the Other, or the essence of the human being, are key ideas to understand the attraction of Korean poets to existentialist thinking and its use in the poems wrote during the post-war. A more detailed analysis of the use of such concepts reveals that in many cases they are not utilized as it would correspond to existentialism, but only as a media to express all the anguish and desperation that corrode the poet after the vision of the tragic war. What is of interest about existentialism in Korea, then, is mainly its sentimentalism and individualism, which are so well adapted to the dramatic circumstances which Korean poets were living. This is what gives it personality; it is the reason why most of the times existentialist thinking is framed in a warlike context, and also why post-war Korean existentialist poetry cannot be considered a simple copy of that from the West. It is a successful poetry, with its own character and gestures.

In Spain, as in the case of Korea, post-war is a literary period that cannot be dissociated from the experience of the Civil War. The horrors of war deeply marked the poets who wrote during that period (Rosales, 2010: 28). Even if at first it can be surprising that the theme of the conflict was not treated during the first years of the post-war (Castellet, 1960: 59), the hurt left by the war was very present and would conclude by flowing through a feeling of abandonment and anguish of an existential sort. Nevertheless, unlike the Korean case, it is considered that the post-war starts from the moment the war is considered over, in 1939, until the end of the dictatorship, in 1975. Hence, there are two fundamental differences here in regards to the Korean post-war period: the first would be the non inclusion of the period of the war in the concept of post-war (which otherwise, regarding to poetry, presents clear similarities with the same period in Korea, since what is written is a poetry with an ideological character and an incitement to fight); the second is its extension, if in the Korean case the war barely reaches a decade, which could be extended to two decades at its maximum, in the Spanish case the concept of post-war reaches three decades, until the death of the dictator.

Therefore, even if it has been said that in Korea all poetry is more or less related to the direct or indirect experience of war, it cannot be said exactly the same for the Spanish case, since it is logic to consider that the poetry given right at the end of the war cannot be identical to that written after more than twenty years, when the experience of war is lived by children who grew up suffering its consequences without having participated in the conflict.

Taking all this into account and given the large extension of the period of the Spanish post-war poetry compared to the Korean one, we will focus in this article on the period that is comparable to Korea, that is, the one that can be identified as the first post-war, and which covers the whole decade of the 1940's and the beginning of that of the 1950's. It is in such a period where we find the more direct influence of the experience of war, just like the answer the poets have before it: a haven in poetry far from reality, as the traditionalist is, or the reflection of a desperation caused by the war and its subsequent existential questioning, which later will become humanism.³

Regarding existential poetry, the reasons for its emergence are the same of those in the case of Korean poetry: the deaths and destruction lived during the war carry the poet to a state of unbelief, loneliness and anguish, feelings that have their best channel for expression in the influence of existential thinking. Nevertheless, unlike the Korean case, the direct influence of the Spanish existentialist poetry seems to be more in the Hispanic tradition than in the larger European context as in the case of South Korea. Especially, we can find such influence in the metaphysic and spiritual poets from the Golden Age,

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3 | This is not the place to go in detail into poetic currents of the Spanish post-war, which, on the other hand, can be easily resumed in "traditionalists" (gathered around the magazine *Garcilaso*), avant-garde (including mainly the "postistas" gathered around the magazine *Postismo*, but also part of the "tremendistas" of *Espadaña*), and existentialists, divided in "rooted" (mainly the Generation of the 36, gathered around the magazine *Escorial*) and "rootless" (Dámaso Alonso, Blas de Otero and some of the *tremendistas* like Crémer and Eugenio de Nora). On the other hand, in the following decade, realist poetry of a social sort will be sought after, being more implicated with reality and society.

in the temporal poetry of Antonio Machado and, especially, in the pre-existentialist thinker and poet Miguel de Unamuno (García de la Concha, 1987: 489). Thus, the influence of Heidegger is especially remarkable in the works of all the existentialist poets from this period in South Korea, in some of whom it can be appreciated also the reading of Kierkegaard, Rilke or other European thinkers and poets.

In such a list it is clearly noted the absence of Sartre, who is considered one of the maximum influences of Korean existentialism, even if the figure of Heidegger was always more important in the case of poetry. His influence cannot be completely discarded in the Spanish case since, for example, the term “existentialism” applied to the poetry from this period comes precisely from its use and popularization by Sartre. Notwithstanding, it can be stated that his thinking was, in this case, more important for the critique to define the poetic current and not for it to be shaped, basically due to the late date of 1943 in which the famous thinker made public *Being and Nothingness*, the work that generated what would later be understood as existentialism.

The horrors suffered during the Civil War, the basic influence of Unamuno, together with the European line in which the notable influence of the mystic tradition of the Golden Age was also inscribed, especially that of San Juan de la Cruz, come together to shape an existentialist poetry with a noticeable autochthonous character, and whose maximum exponent would be *Hijos de la ira* by Dámaso Alonso, published in 1944. The date of publishing is very important here, since it explains why Sartre does not have such an influence in the Spanish poetry of this period, at the same time that it acknowledges Dámaso Alonso’s statement to be right when he denies the fact of his poetry to be existential.⁴ Nevertheless, as it can be appreciated in the analysis of some of his most relevant poems, the themes of the book by Dámaso Alonso are clearly existential. They are not linked to Sartre, but to San Juan de la Cruz, Unamuno, and Heidegger.

This fact is relevant also because the publishing of *Hijos de la ira* in 1944 is believed to have had a large impact on Spanish poetry, especially because until that date only poetry of a classicist, traditional, and religious sort was produced in the country. The emergence within such a panorama of a heartbreaking poetry, of large and free verses, which incorporated daily and even rude vocabulary to make all that anguish flow, all that “anger” that consumed the poet, meant the creation of a new poetic current, the “rootless” poetry in the words of Dámaso Alonso himself. The future members of the “*tremendismo*” would copy such poetry with uneven success, having by maximum exponent, besides Dámaso Alonso himself, the poetry of Blas de Otero in *Ángel fieramente humano* and *Redoble de conciencia*. There is room to state, nevertheless, that a large part of the *tremendismo* current was committed to abuse this informal style, copying only

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4 | Thus, in his book *Poetas españoles contemporáneos*, published in 1952, when the thought of Sartre had clearly entered into Spain, Dámaso Alonso denies in a footnote that his poetry is related to Sartre and even states not being able to finish reading anything by this author. He rejects the title of “existentialist” for his work *Hijos de la ira* (Alonso, 1952: 333).

the form and not the content, fact that ended in the distortion of the movement and put it far from the existential postulates (Asís, 1977: 15).

But this was not the only trend in Spanish existentialism; we can also find a kind of existential poetry that followed the same influences of Unamuno, Antonio Machado, and its golden years, together with Heidegger, especially in the religious-existentialist poetry of Rilke, which was called “*arraigada*” [rooted], in the words of Dámaso Alonso.⁵ The “rooted poetry” would be an existential poetry of a religious kind that, even suffering the existential anguish the same way the “rootless” do, finds an anchor, a firm support in Faith (Alonso, 1952: 345). This is either the Faith in God, in the transcendence of Death, in the peace of family, or in the love for the homeland. Thus, this poetry has a tendency to be more serene, at the same time that it is deeply religious, that is, a religious feeling that is truly felt. The maximum exponents of this movement were the poets who shaped the so-called Generation of the 36, led by Luis Rosales.

In exchange, as it was said before, “rootless poetry” is opposed to the latter in the fact that it does not find such a support (Alonso, 1952: 349). So, initially it is carried through anguish and desperation. Such a contrast between “rooted poetry” and “rootless poetry” configures an important difference with respect to the South Korean case, where such a difference does not exist, apart from the fact that Korean existentialist poetry is shown mainly using the modernist form, while the Spanish one has its own. But there is room to signal out that, as in the case of Korean existentialist poetry, for the different reasons we elucidated in this section, Spanish existentialist poetry presents very particular characteristics too. They correspond mainly to the inclusion of its own literary tradition in the influence of the European currents, as well as the sad fact that war, the true origin of existential literature in Europe, preceded the Second World War, which is not the case in South Korea.

1. A Comparison between existentialist post-war poetry from Spain and from South Korea

1.1. The matter of death

It can be stated that the existential question, the conscience of knowing an “existence” by oneself, departs from the auto-conscience of one’s own death. For this reason it is logical that existential literature emerged in the post-war, because war confronts the individual face to face with death. During war, poets surely witnessed dozens of dead bodies, but they knew they were surrounded by a larger number,

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5 | It is worth to mention at this respect that most of the critics have accepted the early division offered by Dámaso Alonso; nowadays there are studies that do not completely agree, as the example of Noemí Montetes-Mairal, who considers that there is not a great distance between this two types of poetry, since they are linked by a common will of immanence that the generation previous to war already presented (Rosales, 2010: 34).

that Death was near, around them, and nobody was completely safe from it. Thus, many of the poets from the period reflected on the tragic circumstances of war in their poems, designing a scenario of desolation and mayhem, where Death inundates everything.

DDT라는 글자가 의미하는 것은 소독약 또는 이를 잡는 약이라는 것이다. 초연이라는 글자가 의미하는 것은 수많은 총포가 뿜어낸 연기라는 것이다. 지평이라는 글자가 의미하는 것은 땅의 끝이라는 것이다.

El significado de la palabra «DDT» es el de «desinfectante» además de ser una medicina para despiojar. El significado de la palabra «humareda» es el de «humo que emana de incontables armas». El significado de «horizonte» es el de «fin de la tierra»⁶.
(Jeon, «JET.DDT», 2008: 231)

Con la sangre hasta la cintura, algunas veces
con la sangre hasta el borde de la boca,
voy
avanzando
(Otero, «Crecida», 2003: 80-82)

A landscape consumed by war can be appreciated in both poems. The word “Death” does not appear directly but, nevertheless, the feeling of Death inundating the whole scene is clearly present. In the first one, the surface of the land is covered with DDT and the smoke of gunpowder, elements that come to symbolize the capacity for the destruction of life and personal security that is typical of war. As the poetic self itself indicates, the smoke of gunpowder comes from the guns and weapons, alluding clearly to war and the dead produced by it. DDT is a disinfectant; a fact that stands out the capacity of destruction of war that reaches the smallest of things, that goes beyond the human being, spanning all that is alive. The surface of the land and the mountains completely covered by these two elements means, therefore, that they are covered with death produced by war.

The same idea appears in the second poem, apparently a land entirely inundated by blood that flows from the victims of war. But, if in the previous poem the elements that appear are a symbol of destruction and Death, here Death had already taken place, and it was of such magnitude that the blood from all these dead bodies are inundating everything, including the poetic self which is caught impotent in the middle of such destruction.

The main difference between both poems is found in the poetic strategy that each one assumes to show the tragic circumstances of war and the Death carried by it. Thus, the style of Jeon Bong Geon is cold and ironic, but very effective, since the feeling of anguish is obtained assuming an objective point of view that, by contrast, emphasizes even more the tragedy of war (Park, 2004: 262). On

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6 | All translations are by the author and have no literary intentions, but simply to make easier the understanding of the article and the poems.

the other hand, Blas de Otero symbolizes the anguish of the poetic self before Death, through a feeling of suffocation that the poetic self feels, going through a sea of blood that threatens him with drowning.

The vision of such death during war takes us to consider the meaning of existence before the natural fear we have when we face our own death. A theme purely existential thus appears in the poetry from this period: Death as an essential part of life.

Lo que yo siento es
un horror inicial de nebulosa
(Alonso, «A pizca». 2001: 124)

In this poem by Dámaso Alonso, the poetic self is found soliloquizing out loud in a fake “dialogue” with his puppy, a dog called Pizca whom he asks why he howls, and with whom he empathizes (Alonso, 2001: 174). In the first paragraph of the poem we can observe the deep terror that the poetic self feels towards the disappearance of being, after which it can only wait to find “emptiness”. Nevertheless, in the second paragraph, even if such fear of Death survives, the idea of Death as the most essential part of life appears. Those “shadows” that the poetic self sees are the shadows of Death waiting behind them, but at the same time are “la tristeza original,/ son la amargura/ primera,/ son el terror oscuro,/ ese espanto en la entraña/ de todo lo que existe” (Alonso, 2001: 124). In spite of the sadness and horror that the idea of the disappearance of being can signify for the poetic self, at the same time it accepts that actually such an end is the same origin of life, its essence, since every living being is unavoidably destined to Death.

병풍은 무엇에서부터라도 나를 끊어준다
등지고 있는 얼굴이여
주검에 취(醉)한 사람처럼 멋없이 서서
병풍은 무엇을 향(向)하여서도 무관심(無關心)하다
주검의 전면(全面) 같은 너의 얼굴 위에
용(龍)이 있고 낙일(落日)이 있다.

El biombo me separa de todo.
Es la cara que se opone al cadáver,
torpemente de pie como un hombre borracho
el biombo, se oriente hacia donde se oriente, no muestra interés en nada.
Sobre tu cara parecida a la de un muerto
hay un dragón y el ocaso.
(Kim, «Byeongpung», 2003: 122)

On the other hand, in this other poem a folding screen appears having the function of separating the world of the living and the world of the dead, impeding the poetic self, which is in the world of the living, to try to jump to the world of the dead, carried by desperation (Kim,

1999: 112). For this reason, the folding screen is “el biombo en un lugar más alto que la altura de la falsedad” (Kim, 2003: 122). At the same time, the folding screen serves the poetic self to reflect about the nature of Death and acquire conscience of it, especially in the last two verses: “Yo contemplo el biombo/ y la luna a mis espaldas/ iluminaba el sello de los siete caballeros del mar antiguo, dueños del biombo” (Kim, 2003: 122), in which the Moon represents Death. The light of the Moon is lighting up the world of the dead, but the world of the living also, because they are both the same thing (Kim, 1999: 115). Those who today are alive will die one day, and that is the reason why the Moon is lighting up all of them, symbolizing with it that Death is something that reaches everyone and, despite the folding screen, there is not a clear distinction between Life and Death. From the use of the Moon as an image of Death can be deduced that Death is to be another step of existence. As the Moon has its phases, so does existence, Death would just be one of them. One of the phases of the Moon in this case, that enlightens the poetic self, represents Death. It is also possible to interpret that the other phases to represent the other stages of human existence, in an infinite cycle that leaves room for the possibility of Resurrection or Reencarnation as phases that go beyond Death itself. That gives way to the fact that in this poem Death is seen neither as essentially intrinsic to life nor as the origin or the end of it, as happened in the previous poem. On the contrary, Death is here as one more phase of the lunar cycle, which is to say, as one more stage of human existence.

1.2. The loss of essence and the fall of the existential crisis

Besides the matter of Death and its reflection on existence, war is also closely related to another important aspect of existentialism: the existential absurd. This is based on the negation of Karma or Destiny, which means that it is not important whether our acts are good or wrong, there are no punishments or rewards, but disgraces and strokes of luck simply happen, and they do not always affect the people who deserve it. War is a good example of it; since anyone can die or live, without regard to their previous good or wrong actions. The sensation of absurdity, initially only applied to war but finally being extended to the conception of the World itself, can flow into a loss of values and the sensation that Life is absurd or makes no sense. Here is where we find the origin of the loss of an essence in the human being.

¡Ay, yo no soy,
yo no seré
hasta que sea
como vosotros, muertos!
Yo me muero, me muero a cada instante,
perdido de mí mismo,

ausente de mí mismo,
lejano de mí mismo,
cada vez más perdido, más lejano, más ausente.
¡Qué horrible viaje, qué pesadilla sin retorno!
(Alonso, «En el día de los difuntos», 2001: 85)

산허리에 반사하는 일광. Los rayos del sol se reflejan en la ladera de la montaña.
BAR의 연사. El orador del BAR.
비둘기의 똥냄새 중동부전선. En la parte centro-este del frente olor de mierda de paloma.
나는 유효사거리권 내에 있다. Estoy en el área de alcance efectivo.
나는 0157584다. Soy el 0157584.
(Jeon, «0157584», 2008: 30)

In these two poems the same idea of loss of one's own essence appears. In the first, a poetic self-consciousness of its own temporality, of the limitation of his existence, appears, but the fear of death alienates him from himself and doesn't allow him to "stand before Death". He falls in desperation to the point of considering that only the dead are perfect, because they do not have to die. That is the reason why the poetic self feels himself "perdido de mí mismo,/ ausente de mí mismo", completely separated of his own essence and unable to live a full life, accepting Death as an essential part of it.

In comparison, the poem by Jeon Bong Geon is more related to the direct experience of war than the previous one. It is, however, without any doubt a clear example of the loss of the essence of the self, as well as it depicts other themes as the absurd of war. In this poem a depersonalized poetic self appears; a self who is only identified with a number ("0157584"), because war left him even without a name. This poetic self is actually a tool at the service of war, a consumer good, reason why his life has value only as force of combat. He seems to exist, but his existence has been reduced to one of a toy that is cast aside when he is not useful anymore. He is one more number, an anonymous being who endures an equally anonymous death, which has nothing to do with the "essential death" of the *Dasein* that Heidegger talks about. Then, through this "entity" without essence, the author is able to denounce the inhumanity of a war that turns human beings into consumer goods with a number.

The awareness of the loss of essence gives way to desperation and existential anguish, the product of the emptiness the self feels inside him. Here, the conscience of the existential crisis is sharpened and, by chance, darkens the mind in a way that the *Dasein*, the existential self, has to make a strong effort not to fall into nihilism.

-새로운 신에게 A un Nuevo Dios.
여윈 목소리로 바람과 함께 Con la voz de una chamán, junto al aire
우리는 내일을 약속치 않는다. no hagamos ninguna promesa sobre el

mañana.

승객이 사라진 열차 안에서	Dentro del tren de desaparecidos pasajeros
오 그대 미래의 창부여	¡Oh! Tú eres la ramera del futuro
너의 희망은 나의 오해와	y tu esperanza no es más que mi malentendido
감흥感興만이다.	y mi deleite.

(Park, «Mirae-ui changbu», 2006: 82)

Madrid es una ciudad de más de un millón de cadáveres (según las últimas estadísticas).

A veces en la noche yo me revuelvo y me incorporo en este nicho en el que hace 45 años que me pudro,

y paso largas horas oyendo gemir al huracán, o ladrar los perros, o fluir blancamente la luz de la luna.

[...]

Y paso largas horas preguntándole a Dios, preguntándole por qué se pudre lentamente mi alma

(Alonso, «Insomnio», 2001: 81)

In these two poems the poetic self shows a great anguish with regard to his own existence, which impedes him to conceive any hope in the future. In the first poem the series of images is so extreme that it reaches nihilism (Choi, 1994: 79). God has been degraded to the condition of a prostitute, since He has been unable to help humanity entangled in the horrors of war (Yun, 2004: 61). The same dismissed God has no power to grant a better future for humanity, one full of peace, which is reason to say “no hagamos ninguna promesa sobre el mañana”. Thus, any hope, wish or aim, is substituted by anguish and desperation. That is the reason why the poetic voice dares to ask if the aim of God is actually the death of the poetic self.

Curiously, the same image appears almost exactly in the poem by Dámaso Alonso. In this poem, the city of Madrid is compared with a cemetery in which people are not living but decomposing (Alonso, 2001: 167). The poetic self looks to himself as a living dead in a step-by-step process of decomposition, advancing to Death. That creates a great desperation which is transmitted through a language full of anguish, which spares no expense in the use of a colloquial record to achieve his aim; and through the creation of clearly discouraging images. In a night full of existential anguish, the poetic self cannot sleep and asks God about the meaning of life when the only thing waiting for us is Death. The last verse seems to connote, as the previous poem does, that the objective of God is only Death.

1.3. The overcoming of the existential crisis

Nevertheless, existentialism as a philosophy does not advocate a fall

into anguish and desperation. Its final aim is to recover the capacity of life in accordance with one's own essence, being supported by it in the overcoming of the fear of Death. That is, keeping in mind in every moment its limitations, but without letting oneself be pushed around by them.

Thus, a way for trying to recover the essence and to overcome the existential crisis is to put an end to the isolation of the individual that appears when he falls in an existential crisis, to restore the relation with the Other. For the salvation of the self there is not a more suitable media to reconcile with alterity than human love as a way for healing the sorrows left by war.

Me he visto vacilante,
cual si otra vez pesaran sobre mí
80 kilos de miseria orgánica,
[...]
...¡Voy a caer!
Pero el Padre me ha dicho:
«Vas a caerte,
abre las alas.»
[...]
Eran aquellas alas
lo que ya me bastaba ante el Señor,
lo único grande y bello
que yo había ayudado a crear en el mundo.

Y eran
aquellas alas vuestros dos amores,
vuestros amores, mujer, madre.
(Alonso, «Las alas», 2001: 163-164)

In this poem a poetic self appears which is desperate at the beginning, which has the feeling that an offering is due to God in exchange for the salvation of his Soul, but he does not know what, since his individuality is empty of essence and is nothing but “80 kilos of organic misery”. The poetic self is about to “fall” into the abyss of his own desperation when God remembers him that he can “open his wings”. These are the two greatest loves of his life, his mother and his wife, which the poetic self, in his isolation produced by his existential crisis, had completely forgotten. Now, thanks to the words of God he remembers the love for those two beings, the only thing he can give to God in exchange for his salvation. These two loves become “wings” for the poetic self, that save him from falling into desperation, help him to stand during his whole life and, in the future, they will help him also to rise to God when Death overcomes him. The fear of extinction of being is this way compensated by the security these two wings bring to him after he is dead; only they will be able to raise him to God, symbol of the transcendence of Death and the continuity of being. But also of the so wanted spiritual peace, which is in this poet the clear antithesis of the existential crisis (Alonso, 2001: 179).

그러니까 칠 년 전
 1950년 6월 25일 해 뜨기 전 어스름
 갈기갈기 찢겨서 불타오를 때그때
 함께 불타오른 입맞춤의
 증거가 아니고 무엇이겠는가
 미친 대포가 하늘 부수고
 미친 전차의 캐터필러보다도 완강하게 파고들어
 오 대포 소리보다도 사납게 힘차게 터지고 터진
 사랑의 증거가 아니고 무엇이겠는가.

Por eso 7 años antes
 el 25 de junio de 1950 antes de que saliera el sol
 cuando la penumbra se iba rasgando a pedazos y empezaba a arder,
 justo entonces, si eso no era la prueba
 de un beso en el que dos arden juntamente, qué podría ser.
 Eso que penetra obstinadamente más que un cañón loco que quebranta
 el cielo
 y que un tanque oruga loco
 ¡Oh! Que explota y explota más violenta y ferozmente que el ruido de la
 artillería
 si eso no es una prueba de amor qué será.
 (Jeon, «Sarang-eul wihan doipul-i», 2008: 127)

In this poem, love appears as a natural force, so powerful that it is able to express itself even in such terrible circumstances as war. Love is symbolized this way by those “kisses” given the same morning the war begins, and whose fruit is a child who is 6 years old now (Yun, 2004: 158). Love is, therefore, the only vital force opposed to death represented by war, this way becoming the only possible way to be reconciled with the Other and to restore mutual confidence (Mun, 1996: 84). The child has been able to survive the dramatic circumstances of war and his future is now full of hope. His mere existence is in itself a chant for life and hope, and a promise that actually there will be a “tomorrow”. Thus, different to the previous poem, this poem departs from an intimate and sexual love between two people, but is expanded from here to the whole Korean territory and, even beyond, to the love for the life of humanity as a whole. While in the poem by Dámaso Alonso the poetic self discovers its own overcoming of the existential crisis through individual love and accepts it, Jeon Bong Geon sees love as the way for the salvation of humanity, his poetry becoming a chant for faith in life and humankind.

Such an act of faith in humanity ends up being linked to the humanism propagated by Sartre (1999), this way developing a sort of humanist poetry that wants to overcome existential alienation definitively, and take contact with alterity, overcoming the barriers that separate human beings and produce conflicts like war, to be able to reach a universal understanding.

내가 깊이 들이마신 흙냄새는 내 오장육부를 흠뻑 적실 것이다.
 내가 깊이 들이마신 흙냄새는 내 넋 또한 흠뻑 절일 것이다.
 오 마침내 나는

흙이 될 것이다.

El olor a tierra que inhalo profundamente me impregnará las entrañas.
El olor a tierra que inhalo profundamente adobará mi espíritu hasta el tuétano.

¡Oh! Finalmente
me convertiré en tierra.

(Jeon, «Hulg-e uihan shi se pyeon 3», 2008: 109)

If in the previously analysed poem by this author, humanism was expressed through love and his force generative of life, able to make believe in the idea of an encouraging future; in this one, humanism appears related to the idea that the essence of the human being is part of the cycle of nature. Thus, in the first part of the poem, the poetic self is a child who lives in communion with earth and is part of the cycle of nature, symbolized by the circular image of the earth-flower-sky (ascendant) and the rain (descendant) (Park, 1997: 56). In the second part, this cycle is broken by war, reason why the poetic self is deprived of his essence and falls into an existential crisis (Park, 1997: 58). But in the first part we see the apparition of the will and the capacity to overcome that crisis through the recovery of a connection with the natural cycle, which makes the poetic self say: “Oh! Finalmente/ me convertiré en tierra”. The identification of the poetic self with earth symbolizes the union with nature, to which every man contributes. This way, here humanism is expressed through the idea that every human being is actually part of the same thing, the cycle of nature, so humanism itself is transcended in an universal communion that includes everything that is part of it.

Cuando la noche llegue y la verdad sea una palabra igual a otra,
cuando todos los muertos cogidos de la mano formen una cadena
alrededor del mundo,
quizás los hombres ciegos comenzarán a caminar como deambulan las
raíces en la tierra
sonámbula;
caminarán llevando un mismo corazón de mano en mano,
y cuando al fin se encuentren
se tocarán los rostros y los cuerpos en lugar de llamarse por sus nombres,
y sentirán una fe manual repartiendo entre todos su savia,
y crecerán los muertos y los vivos,
unos dentro de otros
hasta formar un solo árbol que llenará completamente el mundo,
cuando llegue la noche.

(Rosales, «Creciendo hacia la tierra», 2010: 384-385)

As in the previous one, in this poem the poetic self is expanded, reaching the rest of humanity, thanks to a kind of communion with nature that makes him transcend his condition of human being and end linked to the Universe (Rosales, 2010: 126). Here, the night is not a negative element, of obscurity and fear, but a magic moment where the past of time seems to stop, and the human being finds a place to

sleep and rest. That is the reason why only in this moment “cuando llegue la noche”, when all men in harmony with nature, “se tocarán los rostros” and “caminarán llevando un mismo corazón de mano en mano”. It means, they will overcome their isolation and will be part of a harmonious and united whole, of which nature, as in the poem by Jeon Bong Geon, will be part too, as clearly symbolized by the image of men linked in the form of a big tree. These men are blind, since they do not need anymore to see anything different to the essence of Man, and this can simply be caught with the heart. Contrary to the previous poem, this union of the whole human being does not refer only to the ones who live, but to the dead also (an idea already suggested by Kim Su Yeong in his poem “Byeongpung”, who, on the other hand, shares many similarities with this poet), because for Luis Rosales this night represents a magic moment which also allows to transcend time, to convert it into something cyclic where dead and alive can touch each other and wait together for Resurrection (Rosales, 2010: 127). Therefore, in this poem we can clearly see the way the union with the Other in communion with nature allows to recognize, even being blind, the essence of the Other, and to recover at the same time one’s own, since every human being becomes part of a universal whole. This way, time and death are transcended, and the existential crisis of the self is overcome.

2. Conclusion

The experience of war, and particularly of a civil war, is not an easy one to forget. The brutality in which both Spain and Korea sunk, with the Second World War as a non-encouraging background, had a terrible impact on the writers of these times, who tried either to escape from that reality, building parallel worlds in their poems, sheltered in the traditions and the memory of the past (as the case of a traditional tendency in of both countries), or to express all the anguish that corroded them inside, creating the existential poetry which has been the object of the present article.

Although, as it was pretended to be shown in this article, this poetry of an existential sort presents very similar characteristics and themes in both countries, in spite of the cultural distance, the differences between aspects or the intensity of the different themes have been pinpointed as well, depending on the treatment by a Spanish poet or by a Korean poet, since we shouldn’t overlook it; and collect it here as a conclusion would be very interesting.

This happens following a theme that makes the experience of war as important as the triggering of the existential crisis. We saw the way it appears in Korean authors of this period like Jeon Bong

Geon, constantly mentioned in his poems, building a key factor to understand his poetry. Nevertheless, in the Spanish case references to war are scarcer and usually appear in a veiled or indirect form. Perhaps it is due to the fact that in the Korean collective imaginary there was not a winner for the war, but both factions failed in their aim to annex the area of the country they missed, producing this way its definitive separation. Thus, war was immediately understood as a tragic and hurting fact, which was possible to talk about openly, since the political situation favoured this process, although South Korea quickly suffered an authoritarian Government too. But the case of Franco's Spain, where a clear winner and a clear loser existed, it was very different: the war that brought victory for the dictator couldn't be seen as a heroic fact to the service of the fatherland. That's the reason why Spanish writers whose feelings were different to those of the official version and only saw in war the negative aspects of destruction and mayhem, had to find subterfuges to be able to speak about it and to evade this way censorship.

This historical context would explain also in part why the existential crisis of the Spanish poets is more focused on the individual experience and the feeling of anguish before one's own existence, while in the Korean poems war is almost always the background. This difference of focus has been observed in many of the analyzed poems in the present study, especially those by Dámaso Alonso and Jeon Bong Geon. Nevertheless, such a divergence does not seem to be due simply to the historical situation outlined here, but presents with all probability more deeper roots that would be linked to the cultural and literary tradition from both countries. Thus, Spanish poetry basically departs from the *I*, from the individual and the feelings he experiences; but in Korean poetry such an *I* or individual appears in lower intensity and we can observe, on the other hand, a bigger interest for the Other and the community.

Finally, another clear difference attributable to the great cultural difference between both countries is the prolix references to elements of nature in the Korean poems, as well as the countless references to God in the Spanish case. In both, anyway, such characteristic goes beyond existential poetry and is linked to the poetic tradition of each country. Nature is a basic theme in Korean traditional poetry, as poetry of a religious character presents a clear trajectory within the history of Spanish literature. Besides, this two themes are especially important in the historic period in which this article is focused, since they constituted a basic element within the poetry of a traditional sort, both Korean and Spanish; a poetry that, nevertheless, was the counterpoint for the poetry that pursued an existentialist character in both countries.

In summary, we could conclude that the poems that make questions

about the meaning of one's own existence and offer an individual solution to the existential crisis would be more common in the Spanish case, while the absurd of war and the vision of the human being as an object, a product of the loss of the essence, appears more frequently in Korean literature. It is worth mentioning that references to God and poetry with a religious character are more characteristic of the Spanish case, while references to nature and the natural cycle are more evident in the Korean one.

However, from all the themes that depart from the traumatic experience of war they also go to the creation of a poetry with an existential character, full with anguish before the vision of Death and the reflection about one's own existence. Afterwards, we can find valuable examples in both countries of a literature that was readier to recover hope and to collaborate in the creation of a new humanism,. That's the reason why we could conclude that beyond any divergences existing between so distant cultures, what matters before an experience such as war are the similarities that get people closer, remembering that together we build humanity.

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* Against this journal's style sheet requirements, the names of all Korean authors are listed here in full form. This choice, which corresponds with the common practice in Korea, is intended to avoid possible confusions generated by the limited number of Korean last names.