



1. *Vicente Huidobro, mid-1920s.*

ALSO BY VOLODIA TEITELBOIM IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Neruda: An Intimate Biography (University of Texas Press)

TITLES BY VICENTE HUIDOBRO FROM SHEARSMAN BOOKS

Selected Poems

Adam / Adán

Square Horizon / Horizon carré

Equatorial & other poems [El espejo de agua, Ecuatorial, Hallali & Tour Eiffel]

Arctic Poems / Poemas árticos

*Painted Poems **

Paris 1925: Ordinary Autumn & All of a Sudden / Automne régulier & Tout à coup

Skyquake / Temblor de cielo

Citizen of Oblivion / El ciudadano del olvido

*Seeing and Touching / Ver y Palpar **

*Last Poems / Últimos poemas **

*Uncollected Poems / Poemas inéditos **

Manifestos / Manifestes

El Cid / Mio Cid Campeador

Cagliostro

Three Huge Novels / Tres inmensas novelas (with Hans Arp)

*Adverse Winds / Vientos contrarios **

** Still unpublished when this biography was released*

SELECTED TITLES BY VICENTE HUIDOBRO FROM OTHER PUBLISHERS

Altazor (translated by Eliot Weinberger; Wesleyan University Press)

Selected Poems (edited by David Guss; New Directions)

Vicente Huidobro
—*In Perpetual Motion*—

Vicente Huidobro

SAMPLE
VOLOBIA TEITELBOIM

translated from Spanish by Tony Frazer

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INTRODUCTION

Volodia Teitelboim's impressionistic biography of Huidobro was first published to coincide with the poet's centenary in 1993, and has the advantage of being written by someone who actually knew him, as well as many of the other significant figures in Chilean poetry of the 1930s and later. As the author relates in the course of the book, he started out as, and remained, a fan of the poet's work, but he is commendably clear about Huidobro's personal faults – and about the cause of the breakdown in his own relationship with the poet. We do in fact need a more objective biography of Huidobro, and one that covers some periods of his life in more exhaustive detail, but Teitelboim's is good as far as it goes, and one I've owned since it first appeared, having found myself living in Santiago at the time of the centenary. I had little expectation in 1993 that, almost 30 years later, I would be guiding my translation of the book towards the printer. One should however be clear that Teitelboim skimps on several aspects of Huidobro's Paris years: for instance, Gerardo Diego, a close friend of Huidobro and initially something of a disciple, is given little attention, and Juan Larrea, another Spanish poet, enthusiastic disciple and lifelong friend, is likewise under-represented. There are also gaps in the *literary* narrative from the early 1920s and the late 1930s, perhaps owing to a paucity of sources available to the author, but it would have been good to learn more than is offered here about the contents and assemblage of the two collections published in 1941, as well as the background to *Saisons choisies* in 1921.

The reason for translating the book is to ensure that more Anglophone readers can get to know the poet, warts and all, and understand some of the driving forces behind his work, as well as his decidedly awkward, driven, personality. It is my view that Huidobro was a wonderful, if uneven, poet, which is why I have been engaged in translating the great majority of his mature poetry for a series of books published by Shearsman, a series that I expect to be completed by 2025. What has become plain, the more I read the surrounding literature, is that Huidobro's passage through Paris and Madrid in the avant-garde years (i.e. 1916–1925), has been over-rated by many Spanish-speaking commentators. The awkward thing is that Huidobro is very important as a conduit for the latest French poetic innovations *into* Spanish; he is however not especially important *in* France, where he was just another, albeit wealthy and noisy, foreigner

on the side-lines of an eruptive phase in literature and art. The difference between Huidobro and the other expatriate literati (e.g. Pound, Bunting, Hemingway, Stein, etc, not to mention Latin Americans such as Vallejo) is that he actually wrote in French for some time, before reverting to his native tongue for his later books. The awkward fact is however that his poetry in French is derivative (initially of Apollinaire and Reverdy) and, in France, represents no more than a minor footnote in literary history. The poetry in *Ecuatorial* [Equatorial, 1917] and *Poemas árticos* [Arctic Poems, 1918], both written in Spanish, seem to have had a significant impact in Madrid, and a native Spanish avant-garde arose in their wake, which was quite hostile to Huidobro the person – he had managed to put quite a few backs up in his “heroic” progress through the Madrid poetry scene.

A short run through the academic literature on Huidobro reveals a great deal of commentary on Creationism (Huidobro’s own literary-Cubist movement, of which he was *effectively* the sole member, although Gerardo Diego and Juan Larrea may also be accorded honorary membership in respect of their early work), much on *Arctic Poems*, and a veritable avalanche of material on the long poem *Altazor* (written, according to the author, between 1918 and 1930, and published in 1931). I find this somewhat hard to swallow, given that the first book owes so much to his French colleagues, and the latter looks in places uncannily like an early long poem by Tristan Tzara – although Tzara’s poem is actually far less interesting, its central conceit undeveloped by comparison with *Altazor*.

Huidobro had ambitions of being a leader, but he kept leaving people behind, with constant swerves of direction, and indeed of domicile; he was also temperamentally ill-equipped to be a disciple, or at least to admit to being one. He does admit to having been a follower in his youth of Rubén Darío (whose shade lies over Huidobro’s juvenile books published in Santiago), and then pays homage to Apollinaire, who died of his war wounds in 1918 and could safely be saluted as a tutelary figure of the past, a kind of patron saint esteemed by all the vanguard poets and painters in Paris. Huidobro’s constant claims to being the first at various things can become a little wearing, but it was a symptom of the age of *isms* as well as of the poet’s personality. In hindsight, it doesn’t really matter who was the first to adopt a certain avant-garde style of poetry, or who was the first to paint an abstract painting; what *actually* matters is whether the resulting work is any good, and can stand the test of time. In my view, Huidobro’s lasting value as a poet lies in *Ecuatorial* [Equatorial, 1918], in *Altazor* [1931], in *Temblor de cielo* [Skyquake, 1931], and in a significant number of the poems collected in the last three, widely under-rated books: *El ciudadano*

del olvido [Citizen of Oblivion, 1941], *Ver y palpar* [Seeing and Touching, 1941], and *Últimos poemas* [Last Poems, 1948]. I enjoy much of the work in his other books but I believe that his reputation should rest on works that lie outside the apparent current consensus.

As far as biography goes, Huidobro's unparalleled ability to get himself into trouble, as poet, lover, critic, and would-be politician, makes him a fine subject of study. The colossal sense of self-entitlement from this scion of a noble house and the Chilean landed gentry can irritate, but I hope we can forgive him at least some of his sins because of the quality of the work that he produced.

§

Valentín Teitelboim Volosky, better known as Volodia Teitelboim, was born in 1916, in Chillán, some 400 kms south of Santiago, the son of Moisés Teitelboim and Sara Volosky, a Jewish couple originating from, respectively, Ukraine and Bessarabia (now Moldova). At 16, he joined the Communist Party, and remained a left-wing activist for the rest of his life.

In 1935, he co-edited, with Eduardo Anguita the *Antología de poesía chilena nueva* [Anthology of New Chilean Poetry]. This volume marked a significant rupture with the past, and managed to give further impetus to the famous, and long-lasting, literary feuds between Huidobro, Neruda and Pablo de Rokha.

Teitelboim stopped writing poetry, but in 1952 published his novel, *Hijo del salitre* [Son of Nitrate], much admired by Neruda, and subsequently translated into several languages. In 1954, he founded and edited the cultural review *Aurora*, and, later, in the 1970s, while living in exile from the Pinochet regime, founded and edited *Araucaria de Chile*. Published in Madrid, over a period of 12 years, this was an important organ of critical resistance for exiled intellectuals. Aside from fiction and extensive personal memoirs, he is well known for his biographies of Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda, as well as the volume at hand. In 2002, he was awarded Chile's National Prize for Literature.

A lawyer by training, in later life he worked for the government, and served for five years as the head of Chile's Communist Party. He died in 2007, at the age of 91.

It will be no surprise that an author of Teitelboim's political convictions will espouse somewhat partial views in this book, when it comes to the political and social arenas, and there are some knee-jerk sarcasms in the book which I think may be forgiven, whatever's one's political perspective.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

I have tried to retain as much of Teitelboim's style as I can, which means respecting his abrupt, almost-telegraphese phrasing, without at the same time leaving the resulting text sitting awkwardly halfway between two languages. I am acutely aware that I may not always have been successful.

Where titles of books are given, I always give the original title first, with a translation in square brackets, and thereafter use only the translation. In terms of people's names, I stick to formal Hispanic naming conventions wherever they are used by the author. Thus, Vicente's wife is, before her marriage, Manuela Portales Bello, Portales being the patronymic, and Bello the matronymic. For short, she would have been Miss Portales, and in formal terms Miss Portales Bello. Upon marriage, she remained Manuela Portales Bello, but also now had an additional formal option: Manuela Portales de García-Huidobro, losing the matronymic and gaining her husband's name. Her first-born child's name was Vicente García-Huidobro Portales. In the cases of more exotic older and aristocratic names, such as Mateo de Toro y Zambrano, de Toro is the patronymic, and Zambrano the matronymic, the interposed *y* meaning *and*. Likewise with María del Carmen Martínez de Aldunate y Larraín, the patronymic is Martínez de Aldunate and the matronymic Larraín. This style has mostly fallen out of use today other than in families of aristocratic heritage. Things can get more complicated in older names, but that only occasionally affects the present volume. For example, the aforementioned María's father was

Juan Miguel José Antonio | Martínez de Aldunate | Garcés de Marcilla

[given names]

[patronymic]

[matronymic]

One final minor aspect regarding names: persons of high status are often referred to by the author with the honorific Don or Doña. We have no exact equivalent in English, but I have referred to Huidobro's mother throughout as *Madame* (pronounced in the French fashion), whenever the author uses *Doña*. Technically, in British usage, she could be referred to as Lady María Luisa, as she was the Marchioness of Casa Real, but I thought that an unnecessary complication. *Madame* it is. In a few other cases, I have retained *Don/Doña* or, very occasionally, for a historical figure, used Lord/Lady, where it seemed appropriate.

§

This edition retains all the footnotes from the original volume, which often refer to Huidobro's *Obras completas* [Complete Works] of 1976. While this is out of print, and thus hard to find for interested readers, the previous edition, from 1964, is even longer out of print. The *Obra poética* [Poetic Works] of 2003 seems to have gone the same way, but as its title reveals, that volume includes only the poetry. In all such cases of footnotes that refer to the *Obras completas*, I have added a second reference to a translation of the text as published in the Huidobro series from Shearsman Books; in some cases these books are not available at the time of this biography's publication, but they will be before the end of 2025. All the Shearsman releases are bilingual, apart from the two republished novels – *El Cid* and *Cagliostro*, both recovered translations from the early 1930s.

Added to Teitelboim's original footnotes are an equal number that elucidate things which I suspect an anglophone reader will need explaining, especially if the references are very local (usually Chilean). My apologies to the reader if you find me telling you the glaringly obvious, but it is hard to judge exactly how much knowledge to assume on the part of the reader. Lastly, the author commits a significant number of factual errors, no doubt caused by errant memory or a failure (or indeed, inability) to double-check sources – enough for me to suspect that I may well have missed some – which I have mostly left intact in the text but have footnoted with corrections.

SAMPLER

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As ever, I need to thank those who have aided my comprehension of an occasionally obscure text. Without the help of Andrés Ajens, Jordi Doce, Terence Dooley, and Valentino Gianuzzi, some very clumsy phrasing – and indeed some outright errors – would have remained intact. Such errors and clumsiness that remain are entirely my own fault, however.

Tony Frazer
May, 2022

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Equatorial & other poems (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2019), translated by Eliot Weinberger [contains *El espejo de agua*, *Hallali*, *Tour Eiffel*, *Ecuatorial*]

Arctic Poems / Poemas árticos (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2019)

Painted Poems (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2022)

Paris 1925: Ordinary Autumn & All of a Sudden / Automne régulier & Tout à coup (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2020)

Skyquake / Temblor de cielo (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2019)

Altazor — unpublished translation

Altazor (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), translated by Eliot Weinberger

Citizen of Oblivion / El ciudadano del olvido (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2021)

Seeing and Touching / Ver y palpar (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2022)

Last Poems / Últimos poemas (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2023)

Uncollected Poems / Poemas inéditos (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2024)

PROSE

Manifestos (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2020)

Adverse Winds / Vientos contrarios (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2023)

El Cid / Mio Cid Campeador (2nd edition, Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2019), translated by Warre B. Wells [1st edition titled *Portrait of a Paladin*, 1931]

Cagliostro (2nd edition, Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2019), translated by Warre B. Wells [1st edition titled *Mirror of a Mage*, 1931]

Three Huge Novels / Tres inmensas novelas (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2020) — written in collaboration with Hans Arp

SAMPLER

*I thank the history of a now remote time which gave me years
of friendship with Vicente Huidobro.*

*I extend my gratitude to his son Vladimir, who revealed events
and memories to me which allowed me to fill out the picture of his
father and mother.*

*I thank his grandson Vicente García-Huidobro Santa Cruz for
news of the family and for the support of the Foundation that bears
the poet's name.*

*To Paula Burchard, who helped me to revive the memory of her
mother, Raquel Señoret, Huidobro's last wife.*

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*To René de Costa, for his research on the man himself, and further
acknowledgements to all the scholars of the subject who paved
the way for me.*

To Jimena Pacheco, for her invaluable collaboration.

Volodia Teitelboim



2. 1898. Vicente Huidobro with his sister Mercedes.

PART ONE

VICENTE I



3. *The hall of the Huidobro family home in Santiago, with (inset) Vicente as an infant.*