*Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*

“Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948)”

Vicente Huidobro is one of the key figures of the Latin American avant-garde. A transnational polyglot who published poetry in French and in Spanish, Huidobro was an important bridge between Europe and Latin America. Perhaps best known for his colorful personality (and aristocratic background), his penchant for writing artistic manifestos, his scathing polemics with contemporary artists (including André Breton, Luis Buñuel, Filippo Marinetti and Guillermo de Toro), as well as his Creationist and literary cubist aesthetics, Huidobro left an indelible mark on the international modernist artistic community in a number of different visual and literary genres.

Huidobro’s Creationist literary movement conceived of poetry as an autonomous and anti-mimetic art form that would no longer rely on the nature-worship of previous generations. As Huidobro argued in his manifestos—dating from 1914 (“Non serviam”) to the early 1930s (*Total*)—the poet should aspire to be a “little God” whose flowers literally “bloom in the poem” (“Arte poética”, 1916). Huidobro also explored the relationship between word and image in his typographically experimental *caligrammes* and painted poems (exhibited in a Parisian theater in 1922), bringing a new voice to the kind of literary cubism produced in the first few decades of the twentieth century. He collaborated with noted writers, artists and intellectuals such as Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Francis Picabia, Gerardo Diego, Paul Éluard, Pierre Reverdy, Blaise Cendrars and others, designing innovative literary magazines with titles like *Nord-Sud* and *Création* and contributing to *L’Esprit nouveau, L’Élan* and *Dada*, to name a few.

Huidobro’s masterpiece, *Altazor: Poem in Seven Cantos* (begun in 1919 but not published until 1931), closes off the so-called period of radical experimentation in the Latin American poetic avant-gardes.Its anti-epic, anti-poetic linguistic machinations make it a centerpiece of the Latin American literary canon. Composed in both French and in Spanish—thus obeying the ethic that it reveals in its Preface, that “[o]ne should write in a language that is not the mother tongue”—*Altazor* narrates the allegorical fall of the eponymous protagonist through the cosmos and in language. The poem touches on philosophical, mystical, religious, linguistic, cosmological, and erotic themes in its progressive deconstruction of the word, creating a new language that rises from the material ashes in the poem’s final disarticulated syllables.

Following *Altazor*’s publication, Huidobro’s life and work turned to activism and more politically committed literary creation, as evidenced by his support of the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, his praise of the Soviet state and his role as Allied war correspondent (for “The Voice of America”) in World War II. Huidobro died of a cerebral hemorrhage sustained during wartime; he is buried in a hillside grave overlooking the sea in Cartagena, Chile, under a monument that quotes *Altazor*’s fifth canto:

“Here lies the poet Vicente Huidobro / the tomb opens and in its depths we see the sea.”

Suggestions for further reading:

Correa-Díaz, Luis and Scott Weintraub, eds. *Huidobro’s Futurity: 21st-Century Approaches*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P Hispanic Issues OnLine, 2010. <<http://hispanicissues.umn.edu/Spring2010.html>>

De Costa, René. *Vicente Huidobro: The Careers of a Poet*. London: Oxford UP, 1984.

Huidobro, Vicente. *Altazor, or, A Voyage in a Parachute: Poem in VII Cantos*. Trans. Eliot Weinberger. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2004.

---. *The Selected Poetry of Vicente Huidobro*. Trans. David Guss. New York: New Directions, 1982.

“Vicente Huidobro”. Web portal hosted by La Universidad de Chile. <<http://www.vicentehuidobro.uchile.cl/>>

Sucre, Guillermo. *La máscara, la transparencia. Ensayos sobre poesía hispanoamericana*. México: Tierra Firme, 1985.

Yúdice, George. *Vicente Huidobro y la motivación del lenguaje*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1978.

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[Eric—all of these changes look fine. The only deletion that I feel might be important is the one about Huidobro’s long residence in Europe—I think that it shows that he wasn’t just reading and writing from far away, but rather was really integrating himself into the “center” from a marginal place.

Regarding media suggestions:

“Vicente Huidobro”, portrait drawn by Pablo Picasso (1921); <<http://www.vicentehuidobro.uchile.cl/galeria/galeria21.htm>>

“Moulin”, painted poem (Huidobro and Robert Delaunay) (exhibited June 1922 in the Théatre Edouard VII, Paris) [<http://www.memoriachilena.cl/temas/documento\_detalle2.asp?id=MC0004800&id\_ut=vicentehuidobro(1893-1948)&pag=0](http://www.memoriachilena.cl/temas/documento_detalle2.asp?id=MC0004800)>

“Paysage”, ”, painted poem (Huidobro and Robert Delaunay) (exhibited June 1922 in the Théatre Edouard VII, Paris) <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/temas/documento\_detalle2.asp?id=MC0004829&id\_ut=vicentehuidobro(1893-1948)&pag=0>