

Huidobro and Parra: World-Class Antipoets

Dave Oliphant

With the publication in 1569–1589 of Alonso de Ercilla’s *La Araucana*, the poetry of Chile in Spanish originated with a major work that placed the country in the forefront of what would become an internationally acclaimed Hispanic New World literature. Thereafter, however, Chilean poetry of comparable significance would not for over three centuries emanate from the long, thin land of towering Andes mountains and soaring Pacific surf, whose native peoples Ercilla had celebrated in his epic poem, a work esteemed even by Cervantes in his *Don Quijote*.¹ Not, in fact, until Vicente Huidobro published in 1916 his avant-garde *El Espejo de agua* (*The Mirror of Water*), and in 1931 his monumental *Altazor*, did Chile become, in terms of poetry, the leading post-Independence Latin American nation. As “Poeta / Anti poeta” and “antipoeta y mago” (Poet / Anti poet and antipoet and magician), Huidobro would decree in his “Manifiesto Perhaps” that “THE GREAT DANGER TO THE POEM IS THE POETIC,” that to “add poetry to what has it already without you” is to pour honey on honey, “it’s sickening.”² In his “antipoetry,” Huidobro replaces the “poetic” with a space-age “Gimnasia astral” (Astral gymnastics), and like the famous “pequeño Dios” (little God) of his “El espejo de agua,” he creates his own world and all that he says, careful as a “manicurist” not to glut his writing with descriptive words, since the adjective that does not give life, takes it away.³ With *Altazor*, Huidobro demonstrates in practice his theory of Creationism, a program for inverting the natural order of the universe. Instead of plagiarizing God by simply imitating nature, Huidobro plays “fuera del tiempo” (outside of time) and places in orbit his own planetary landscape, “fuera del mundo cotidiano” (outside the everyday world), in which the tree perches on a turtledove and the flower sucks a bee, rather than the other way around.⁴

Huidobro’s program for a new poetry was, though the first, not the only meaningful development in Chilean poetry of the first part of the twentieth century. The era also saw the emergence of the vast metaphorical imagination of Huidobro’s fellow countryman, Pablo Neruda. Predictably, literary envy and invective erupted from the conflict between these two volcanic figures, as it did from the virulent clashes between Huidobro and another Chilean poet of the period, Pablo de Rokha. By 1938, a third major

poet had appeared on the Chilean scene, in the person of Nicanor Parra, who aligned himself more with Huidobro, descending from the latter to the extent that he too became a self-proclaimed antipoet.⁵ In a sense, being an “antipoeta” for Huidobro indicated his rejection of the poetry of all other poets. His declaration in *Altazor*, that he was “el único cantor de este siglo” (the only singer in this century), was in part a denial of the validity of Neruda’s cornucopia of nature-derived imagery.⁶ Yet in many ways, Huidobro, after his death in 1948, became the forgotten Adam of modern Chilean poetry, overwhelmed by Neruda’s deluge of book after book of undeniably imaginative metaphor-making—not that Huidobro had not already created an endless array of metaphors of his own in Canto V of *Altazor*, with its kaleidoscopic, transformed images of mill, moon, rainbow, and tomb, among many others.

With the publication in 1954 of Nicanor Parra’s *Poemas y antipoemas*, which avoids Neruda’s verbose, adjectival approach, the “second” Chilean antipoet perhaps helped to restore, first through his 1954 collection and later through his subsequent volumes of antipoems, something of the priority of Huidobro in the Chilean hierarchy.⁷ Certainly on January 10, 1993, the hundredth anniversary of Huidobro’s birth and almost forty years after the appearance of *Poemas y antipoemas*, Parra fully acknowledged the Creationist’s influence on his own antipoetry by delivering an eighty-four section antipoem-speech entitled “Also Sprach Altazor,” subsequently published in Parra’s *Discursos de sobremesa* of 2006.⁸ As an assessment of Huidobro’s contribution to Chilean letters and to Parra’s own thought and expression, “Also Sprach Altazor” reveals the lasting impact of Chile’s first great modernist writer on the next generation’s leading antipoetic “disciple,” as Parra would characterize his relationship with Huidobro in section three of his antipoem-speech.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the farsighted French observer of the nineteenth century, employed the word “antipoetic” in 1840 in reference to the “petty,” “insipid” life of democratic America. Despite the negative connotations of “antipoetic,” the term did not hinder the Frenchman from seeing that there was something in American life that “is full of poetry, and that is the hidden nerve which gives vigor to the frame” (*Democracy in America* 89).⁹ De Tocqueville goes on to predict that “Amongst a democratic people poetry will not be fed with legendary lays or the memorials of old traditions. The poet will not attempt to people the universe with supernatural beings in whom his readers and his own fancy have ceased to believe” (91). Yet de Tocqueville does worry that the poetry of democratic nations “will be for ever losing itself in the clouds, and that it will range at last to purely imaginary regions. I fear that the productions of democratic poets may often be surcharged with immense and incoherent imagery, and exaggerated descriptions and strange creations; and that the fantastic beings of their

brains may sometimes make us regret the world of reality” (94). Whereas Huidobro was given to “strange creations” (which were not realistic but which, as he said, became or even supplanted reality) and Neruda and de Rokha were inclined toward “exaggerated descriptions,” Parra would, in ridiculing our foibles and hypocrisies, hew close to quotidian life as we know it, which can so often, as Huidobro himself suggests, “make us regret the world of reality.”¹⁰ Despite the differences in Huidobro and Parra’s antipoetic conceptions, there are many points at which their writings share similar perspectives and somewhat similar forms of utterance.

To study the antipoems of Parra is necessarily to revisit Huidobro and to understand the “Master’s” effect on his “disciple,” as again Parra characterizes their relationship in “Also Sprach Altazor.” As a devoted advocate of Huidobro’s work, Parra yet remains true to his own antipoetic stance, able at times to poke fun at the Master’s antics and self-importance. Above all, Parra values Huidobro’s humorous side, as when the latter states “Hay que resucitar las lenguas / Con sonoras risas” (We must revive the languages / With raucous laughter),” since, as Parra implies in “Also Sprach Altazor,” Huidobro and he agree that “Es un error muy grande / Tomar el mundo en serio / La verdadera seriedad es cómica” (It is a very great error / To take the world seriously / True seriousness is comic).¹¹ In creating his own original mode of antipoetry, Parra mostly departs from Huidobro’s type of inverted nature, his rearranged words and images (“Rotundo como el unipacio y el espaverso” [Round as the unimos and the cosverse]), with Parra more often depicting the actual absurdities of everyday life that he sees or overhears:

Tumbas que parecéis fuentes de soda [. . .]
Dícese que el cadáver es sagrado,
Pero todos se burlan de los muertos.
¡Con qué objeto los ponen en hileras
Como si fueran latas de sardinas!

(Tombs that look like soda fountains [. . .]
They say the corpse is sacred
But they all make fun of the dead.
Why do they lay them in rows
As if they were sardines?)¹²

Nonetheless, Parra makes it clear in the first section of “Also Sprach Altazor” that without Huidobro, Chilean poetry would have been reduced to the sonnets and odes of Neruda and the moans and groans of de Rokha, nothing to compare with Huidobro’s inversion of objective reality, as in his “Un caballo que se va agrandando a medida que se aleja” (A horse that moves off growing larger as it goes).¹³ As a professionally trained physicist

who nevertheless delights in paradox, Parra naturally finds Huidobro's antiscientific image far more attractive than any imitation of the natural order of things; indeed, Parra alludes to Huidobro's image when he writes in section fifty-eight of "Also Sprach Altazor": "Recuerda a ese caballo / Que se agranda a medida que se aleja" (Remember that horse / That grows larger as it moves away).¹⁴

In an interview in 1938, Huidobro proclaimed that "Modern poetry begins with me" (Guss x). By 1962, in Parra's *Versos de salón* (*Salon Verses*), he would link Huidobro's claim with his own declaration that "La poesía terminó conmigo" (Poetry ended with me).¹⁵ If Huidobro was capable of playfulness, as in *Altazor*, where he has the rivers and jungles ask him "What's new? how are you?" Parra could remark ironically in "Letters from a Poet Who Sleeps in a Chair" that "Reading my poems makes me drowsy / And yet they were written in blood."¹⁶ In "Homenaje a Huidobro" (Homage to Huidobro), Parra indirectly "answers" another instance of his predecessor's sense of humor, as expressed in Huidobro's Preface to *Altazor*: "Los cuatro puntos cardinales son tres: el Sur y el Norte" (The four cardinal points are three: South and North) (Huidobro 2003: 4–5). Parra's version of Huidobro's witty assertion is that "Los cuatro grandes poetas de Chile / Son tres" (The four great poets of Chile / Are three), and, as with Huidobro's cardinal points, Parra only lists two poets: Rubén Darío, the Nicaraguan who briefly lived in Chile, where in 1888 he published *Azul*, his first book and the principal work of Spanish *modernismo*; and Alonso de Ercilla, who was born in Spain but came to Chile as a conquistador.¹⁷

In seeing himself as a little God and the first poet of his age, Huidobro could be earnest about his role as a Creationist, whereas Parra, for his part, enjoys puncturing any inflated notion of the poet as an Olympian figure, as when he asks in "Autorretrato" (Self-Portrait),

¿Qué os parece mi cara de abofeteada?
 ¡Verdad que inspira lástima mirarme! . . .
 Observad estas manos
 Y estas mejillas blancas de cadáver,
 Estos escasos pelos que me quedan.
 ¡Estas negras arrugas infernales!
 Sin embargo yo fui tal como ustedes,
 Joven, lleno de bellos ideales. (1966: 10–11)

(What do you think of my clobbered face?
 Doesn't it make you sick to look at me? [. . .]
 Observe these hands
 And these cheeks white as death,
 These few hairs I have left.
 These infernal black wrinkles!

All the same, I was very much like you,
Young, full of pretty ideals.)

Parra is alluding to Huidobro, it would seem, when he asserts that “Los poetas bajaron del Olimpo” (The poets came down from Olympus), and that rather than poets, “los gusanos son dioses” (worms are gods).¹⁸ For Parra, the poet, as he maintains in “Manifiesto,” is not an alchemist (or a magician) but a man like any other, a carpenter who constructs walls, doors, and windows, and the poet’s job “Consiste en superar la página en blanco / Dudo que eso sea posible” (Parra 2006: 143) (is / To improve on the blank page / I don’t think that’s possible). Parra never sounds so optimistic as Huidobro, for instead of creating his own world and a new language (as Huidobro does in Canto VII of *Altazor*), Parra seeks to reform the present creation by pointing out our illusions and indiscretions and doing so in colloquial speech, calling, as he would say, a spade a spade.

Throughout “Also Sprach Altazor,” Parra discloses that he has closely read the Master’s works and shows that he knows both his life story and its legendary or mythical elements. Parra is familiar not only with the real Huidobro but his fictional personalities, as demonstrated in section two of Parra’s antipoem-speech: “En particular ese naufragio / Que nos sonrío desde su paracaídas” (In particular that shipwrecked one / Who smiles at us from his parachute).¹⁹ While Parra’s “Also Sprach Altazor” is intended as an appreciation of Huidobro and his career, it begins with a subtitle which, according to Parra, is in English, even though he only gives us the Spanish: “Hay que cagar en Huidobro” (Parra 2006: 106; 2009: 173) (We have to crap on Huidobro). Certainly Parra finds many opportunities in his eulogy to parody his celebrated subject, as in section two where he compares Huidobro to the most famous figure in Chilean aeronautical history, Lieutenant Bello, who was lost in a fog and neither he nor his plane was ever located.²⁰ The notion that Huidobro did not really know where he was going and had lost his way lies perhaps just below the surface of Parra’s homage. In section four, Parra first offers a list of some of Huidobro’s outstanding qualities or accomplishments, such as husband, confidant, abductor, antibridegroom, sharp dresser, the best cook on the planet, champion of the 100 meter dash, the first metaphysician of the Mapocho, and he who shut up Pablo de Rokha (“Hazaña mayor imposible” (Parra 2006: 110; 2009: 177) [Quite an impossible feat]), but then he mentions once again “El aviador extraviado en la niebla” (The pilot lost in the fog).

True to Parra’s antipoetic procedure of ever seeing both sides of any issue—whether social, political, religious, philosophical, or literary—he tends to give with one hand and take away with the other. In section three of “Also Sprach Altazor,” Parra confesses that as a poet he has learned practically everything from Huidobro, including a few bad habits (Parra 2006: 109; 2009: 175). One habit that Parra apparently picked up from

Huidobro is writing about coffins. In Huidobro's *Vientos contrarios* of 1926, he remarked of coffins that they "debieran tener remos: como que son las barcas del Leteo" (Huidobro 1957: 342) (ought to be fitted out with oars: since they are the boats of Lethe). Among Parra's countless "artefactos" (artifacts)—found objects that have been slightly altered, placed in a contradictory context, and/or captioned with a telling antipoem—is a black wooden coffin to which Parra attached a propeller.²¹ In a review of the 2001 exhibit that included an "artefacto" coffin, which rests on a gurney, and another standing upright, Juan Antonio Ramírez observes of the latter that it was opened to reveal a steering wheel, with the inscription reading: "En caso de resurrección haga girar la tapa del ataúd en sentido contrario a los punteros del reloj. Éste es un ataúd automática" (In case of resurrection turn the coffin lid counterclockwise. This is an automatic coffin).²² If Parra took the idea for his coffin "artefactos" from Huidobro's image of coffins with oars, he certainly expanded on his Master's creation, for Parra has written a number of antipoems on coffins, all of which he presents from a variety of perspectives, including, in "Memorias de un ataúd" (Memories of a Coffin), from the point of view of the coffin itself. In something of a Huidobrian image, the coffin in "Memorias de un ataúd" describes how it was thrown on an apparatus with wheels and

impulsado por un motor a bencina
 que salió disparado por la ciudad
 experiencia que no olvidaré jamás
 puesto que de una plumada
 mi vida cambió en 180°
 pasé de la inmovilidad absoluta
 a un estado de movimiento perpetuo
 hasta que llegamos a una casa particular
 donde fui depositado sobre una mesa de comedor. (1985: 118–19)

(rocketed through the city
 propelled by a gas engine
 an experience I will never forget
 for all at once
 my life took a 180° turn
 I went from complete inertia
 to a state of perpetual motion
 until we arrived at a private house
 where I was laid on a dining room table.)

In section six of "Also Sprach Altazor," entitled "Comillas" (In Quotes), Parra allows Huidobro to speak for himself. Among the statements that "Huidobro" makes are the following:

Talento poético nulo
 Mi único mérito consiste
 En saber reconocer mis errores
 En algo sí que soy intransigente:
 La poesía contemporánea comienza conmigo. (2006: 112; 2009: 181)

(Poetic talent null & void
 My only merit consists
 In knowing how to recognize my own mistakes
 On one score I am uncompromising:
 Contemporary poetry begins with me.)

Huidobro also informs us that he has published many poems in Chilean and foreign magazines, always to the complete satisfaction of reader friends and the most demanding critics, and concludes that the truth must be told. Entitled “¿Loco? No sé de qué se escandalizan tanto” (Loco? I Don’t Know What’s So Shocking), section seven argues that it is better to be crazy than sane, since wise, sensible men only make our lives miserable with their wars, idylls, and equations. Parra concludes this section by blessing Huidobro, referring to him as his Holiness for having been a thousand times off his rocker, and exclaiming “¿qué profesor o padre de la patria” (2006: 113; 2009: 183) (what a teacher or founding father!). In section eight, Parra reports that Huidobro once corrected a line in Homer, changing “Las nubes se alejan como un rebaño de ovejas” (The clouds move off like a flock of sheep) to simply “Las nubes se alejan balando” (The clouds move off bleating). Parra ends this section by saying that it seems Huidobro was right to “improve” on Homer, a conclusion that leaves the reader suspecting that the speaker may have his tongue in his cheek, whereas the praise in section seven made sense and seemed well deserved. With Parra the combination of rendering honor to and sending up his Master is typical of the disciple’s own form of antipoetry that aims at paying dues yet telling the truth, more so it may be than Huidobro was doing when he reported on his friends’ and critics’ response to his published works.

Section nine of “Also Sprach Altazor” lists Huidobro in first place in any contest, with second place vacant and third filled by poet Braulio Apenas. Parra has punningly changed the real surname of Braulio Arenas to “Apenas,” since in Spanish the word means “barely” or “hardly,” implying that Braulio just managed to come in third to Huidobro. For Parra, it seems, neither Neruda nor de Rokha is in the running for Chile’s greatest poet; certainly he does not rank them among the top three. But Parra once again undercuts his praise for Huidobro when he characterizes “Altazor,” the title of section ten, as a poem that “empieza varias veces / Y no termina nunca de empezar” (begins several times / And never stops starting). Parra then recalls

the generally opposing views taken of *Altazor*: “Una majestuosa catedral inconclusa / La obra gruesa de una catedral” (2006: 116; 2009: 187) (A majestic unfinished cathedral / The skeleton of a cathedral).

In section twelve, Parra appears to approve of the fact that Huidobro never stuck to one position, with his example coming from Huidobro’s politics. After the Master had written a poem in honor of Lenin, he then turned around one-hundred-eighty degrees when he realized that things were not going well in the communist direction, an about-face that Parra says proves Huidobro’s lucidity and presence of mind. This is followed in section thirteen by Parra’s judgments that anyone who has studied the world cannot help but become a communist, that anyone who has studied Communism cannot help but become an anarchist, that anyone who is not an idealist at twenty has no heart, but anyone who is an idealist at forty does not have a brain. All of this suggests that Huidobro was a winner because he did not hesitate to change his mind, and that at the proper times in his life he had a heart or a head on his shoulders.

With section twenty, Parra announces that Huidobro promoted an international anti-Neruda operation, but Parra says that he is going to come down on top of Huidobro with all his might, “Que es muy grande” (2006: 126; 2009: 209) (Which is very great). But then, in section twenty-one, as will be expected by now, Parra himself does an about-face and lampoons Neruda, by developing a boxing metaphor as a way of implying that the latter did not know how to fight cleanly. This leads in section twenty-three to Parra’s allusion to a book by Faride Zerán, entitled *La guerrilla literaria: Huidobro, de Rokha, Neruda* (1992), in which the author traces the literary war engaged in by these three Chilean rivals. Parra’s apparent position is that Huidobro got the best of both his challengers. As the poem has it, Huidobro whipped his opponents, on one occasion, by virtue of a clever comeback to the pair’s accusation that he descended from a slave trader. Huidobro replied that he preferred such a heritage to being, like Neruda and de Rokha, the offspring of his grandfather’s slaves. Neruda once attacked Huidobro by declaring in public that he did not see how an aristocrat could write poetry, to which Huidobro responded in kind that he did not see why in order to write poetry one had to be the son of a railway worker, a dig at the occupation of Neruda’s dad. In terms of whose background was more proper for being a poet, Parra has Huidobro state in section twenty-seven, entitled “Pseudonym,” that he has nothing to hide in his bloodline, that he has never changed his name (as both Neruda and de Rokha did), and that furthermore he is a direct descendant of the epic hero El Cid, the subject of Huidobro’s poetic novel, *Mío Cid Campeador* (1929).²³ In section twenty-nine, Huidobro delivers another uppercut to Neruda’s pugilistic jaw in response to the latter’s charge that Huidobro’s poetry is too cerebral. Huidobro battles

back that he does not write with his feet, and rather than writing for maids, as Neruda does, he composes his poetry for princes.

Parra next takes up the issue of the various literary movements or tendencies popular during Huidobro's day. In section thirty, Huidobro, the "Poète français / Né au Chili" (French poet / Born in Chile), as he will be called in section thirty-two, is speaking with Mother Nature, informing her that he is not a Dadaist, Surrealist, Futurist, NewWorldist, masochist or social realist, but "Creacionista mujer x Dios / El poeta es un pequeño Dios / Un pequeño demonio / ce'est la même chose" (2006: 138, 136; 2009: 233, 229) (By god woman a Creationist / The poet's a little God / A little devil / it's the same thing). Huidobro goes on to explain that he has nothing against Mother Nature but he wants to create his own rivers, trees, and volcanoes, just as she gave birth to hers. In all this, of course, Parra is summarizing Huidobro's Creationist theories, but doing so after his own comedic, antipoetic manner. In sections thirty-four and thirty-six, Parra once again summarizes, with tongue in cheek, Huidobro's Creationist practice, which includes saying goodbye to the remote past, mimesis, and negative capability, renouncing rhyme and meter, replacing the photographic camera with the kaleidoscope, having cows climb on rainbows, and printing poems on toilet paper.²⁴ To this Parra responds, in section thirty-six, with sensational, ingenious, and elephantastic, only to conclude with "Pero no nos vengán con que eso es poesía" (2006: 142; 2009: 241) (But don't come around telling us that that is poetry).

In section thirty-seven, Parra defines poetry as whatever unites us, whereas only prose can keep us apart. Poetry, he says, is founded on the word, but ultimately you yourself are poetry, or, as in the section's last line, you yourself are antipoetry (an allusion to poem XXI of Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's *Rimas*). In section thirty-eight, entitled "Para complicar otro poco las cosas" (To Complicate Matters a Little More), Parra suggests that Huidobro was not so entirely revolutionary in his view of poetry as he had claimed. Parra then reveals that Huidobro was a sincere admirer of modernists of the second order, and that he passionately advanced a lesser figure like Pedro Antonio González as THE poet of Chile, as if such outstanding poets as Manuel Magallanes (1878–1924) and Carlos Pezoa Véliz (1879–1908) had never existed.

In section forty-three, Parra returns to the literary war between Huidobro and his rivals Neruda and Pablo de Rokha, which Parra intimates the latter of these had lost before the conflict even began, since de Rokha did not know what he was getting into by tangling with the champ. In almost every section of Parra's tribute to Huidobro, he defends him from his critics' attacks and takes his side against his greatest literary enemies, Neruda and de Rokha. Yet now Parra finds that none of the Big Three lived up to his words; Parra's example is the trio's declaration of love for Rimbaud. Parra

contends that the three Chileans failed to back up unconditionally their professions of love, since none of them amputated his leg and none of them quit writing at age twenty. Parra ends the section by confessing that he has just started reading at the age of eighty.

In section fifty, Parra considers the divided opinions as to who is the greatest poet of the New World. Some, he says, place the author of *Altazor* above all others, whereas some rate either Pound, Whitman, Vallejo, or Drummond de Andrade number one, not to mention the Nerudians, who were always the most powerful in promoting their own contestant as the greatest: “El oro de Moscú pues” (2009: 269) (The Moscow gold, don’t you know). As for the modernism practiced by most of the candidates, Parra concludes that it is still in fashion, even though it is no longer a valid method for thinking about the contemporary world. The implication seems to be that only Parra’s own antipoetic methodology remains an effective model, and yet, in section fifty-one, he declares that on nearing the third millennium, it is clear that with years time has favored Huidobro, who will forgive us all for ever having doubted that his work would endure.

One of several reasons that Parra gives for Huidobro’s centrality is his ecological dimension, which Parra evokes in section fifty-five. Ecology is dear to Parra himself, and so it is not surprising that he calls for a re-reading of Huidobro’s “versículos” (his Bible-like “verses”) in *Altazor*. The particular lines to which Parra refers, without quoting them himself, appear in Canto I, and concern Huidobro’s prophetic vision of technology laying waste the planet (“Y las máquinas mataron el último animal” (And the machines killed the last animal) and of man being reduced by overpopulation to an ant, a mere number (“En donde el hombre-hormiga será una cifra” (2003: 38–41) (Where ant-man will be a cipher). In Huidobro’s vision of future cities, mankind, in order to survive, will have to plant gardens of tomatoes and cabbage, instead of flowers, and to set out fruit trees along all the roads and in all the public parks. With irony Huidobro sighs, “Ah la hermosa vida que preparan las fábricas” (2003: 40–41) (Oh the beautiful life the factories create). In section fifty-six, Parra continues his ecological theme by declaring, as he does in a number of his other works, that our mistake has been in thinking that we own the earth, when we only belong to it. In addition to serving as a precursor in terms of antipoetic theory and practice, Huidobro also preceded Parra by predicting the ecological tragedy that Parra himself has for years warned against. Huidobro had already foreseen the coming of the catastrophic death of species and of the polluting of our air, for which Parra honors him, to Parra’s own credit.

The idea that Huidobro should be re-read follows not only from ecological considerations but simply from the fact that, as Parra affirms in section eighty, Huidobro is a required author for every young poet and every

reader worth his salt. In section eighty-two, Parra declares that Huidobro laid the first and last stone of the edifice designated as the New Chilean Poetry, and this was, he emphasizes, before Neftalí Reyes changed his name (to Pablo Neruda). As Parra puts it, Huidobro came down from his ivory tower and said no to “toda forma de tontalitarismo” (2006: 191; 2009: 337) (every form of totalitaridiocy). And yet with all this, as Parra had indignately noted in section fifty-eight, a reader cannot even find a Complete Works of Huidobro, for there exists no cheap or luxury edition. Parra addresses the President of the Chilean Society of Writers and asks him to explain such an anomaly. Parra goes on to say that Huidobro was denied the National Prize under the pretext that he was dead, which causes Parra to exclaim: “Ojalá los amigos sepultureros / Estuvieran tan vivos como él” (2006: 165; 2009: 285) (Would that his gravedigging friends / Were as alive as he). Parra further vents his ironic rage by reminding his reader that Huidobro never received the National, Nobel, and not even the Municipal prize, “Y todavía hay gente que cree en los premios!” (2006: 166; 2009: 287) (And there are still people who believe in prizes!).

In his tribute to Huidobro, Parra makes it clear that he prefers the Creationist to any other contender to the title of Chile’s greatest poet. In section seventy-nine, Parra offers his personal opinion that Huidobro is one of the very few poets whose work one can read straight through, whereas the writing of most poets has to be read from back to front, otherwise nothing much comes of it. Parra had begun to conclude his “Also Sprach Altazor” by revealing in section sixty-three that from his home in Las Cruces, across the bay from Cartagena, he could see Huidobro’s tomb. In section seventy-one Parra alludes to Chilean writer Enrique Lafourcade, who had hinted that Huidobro died in Cartagena from a heart attack because he was too cheap to pay for a taxi to drive him to the top of the hill, with all his bags and wearing a dark suit in the middle of summer. Previously, in section sixty-two, Parra had ticked off the ages at which the great Chilean poets had died: Huidobro at 55; Enrique Lihn at 58; Gabriela Mistral at 68; Neruda at 69. The moral is, Parra says, “Los inmortales no llegan a los 70” (2006: 170; 2009: 295) (Immortals don’t make it to 70). Unlike these more humorous sections, section sixty-three memorializes Huidobro as a truly vital spirit, since Parra states that from morning to night he can perceive “Las señales eléctricas del poeta / Amanece y se pone con el sol” (2006: 171; 2009: 297) (The poet’s electric signals / He rises and sets with the sun). Here it may be that Parra is playing upon a line in Canto I of Huidobro’s *Altazor*: “El sol nace en mi ojo derecho y se pone en mi ojo izquierdo” (2003: 34–35) (The sun rises in my right eye and sets in my left), but the ultimate and unequivocal tribute to Huidobro comes in the final section of “Also Sprach Altazor,” number eighty-four, in which Parra quotes the opening lines of Huidobro’s

“Monumento al mar” (Monument to the Sea), one of the poet’s last great poems.

With only one small change to the original text of “Monumento al mar,” Parra closes his own poem with Huidobro’s lines that call for

Paz sobre la constelación cantante de las aguas
 [. . .]
 Paz sobre la lápida de los naufragios
 Paz sobre los tambores del orgullo y las pupilas tenebrosas
 Y si yo soy el traiductor de las olas
 Paz también sobre mí. (1981: 210–11)

(Peace above the singing constellation of waters
 [. . .]
 Peace above the tombstones of the shipwrecked
 Peace above the drums of pride and the dark pupils of the eye
 And if I’m the translator of waves
 Peace too above me.)

By merely altering Huidobro’s “traductor” (translator) to read “traiductor,” Parra ends with one of his frequent bits of word play, a combination of “traitor” and “translator,” not letting us forget, perhaps, that he is more the antipoet than even his admired and honored mentor (*Discursos de sobremesa* 193).²⁵ And yet, how many times in *Altazor* has Huidobro rearranged such words as horizon and mountain into “horitaña” and “montazonte” or violoncello and swallow into “violondrina” and “goloncelo” (2003: 88–89).

In “Also Sprach Altazor,” Nicanor Parra has saluted Vicente Huidobro as the type of a Nietzsche who overturned the traditional world of poetry through his experimental and still innovative conceptions. Although Parra can satirize his fellow antipoet, he has clearly read Huidobro with an eye to his antipoetic lessons and has found in specific passages of his *Altazor* and its Preface, as well as in other of his poems and prose, the kinds of wit, intelligence, and daring that greatly appeal to Parra’s own sense of the poet as an audacious thinker and adventurous verbal artist. Parra’s affinity for Huidobro’s program of a new antipoetic order is obviously based on the former’s having chosen an approach to the New World poem different from Neruda’s more often morose and humorless catalogs of flora and fauna and his rather romantically effusive litanies of earthly landscapes and human love. In “Also Sprach Altazor,” through paying homage to Huidobro’s precedence as a playful, ironic, and iconoclastic antipoet, Parra returns to the roots of his own irreverent, intentionally irritating, and ingenious writing, which owes much to his Master’s having laid the first, if not the last, stone of Chile’s antipoetic line, a lineage that now spans two centuries and continues to garner readers around the globe.

Notes

1. In the book-burning scene in Chapter 6, Ercilla's epic poem appears in the following speech: "—'Todos esos tres libros' [*La Araucana, La Austríada, El Monserrate*]—dijo el Cura—'son los mejores que, en verso heroico, en lengua castellana están escritos, y pueden competir con los más famosos de Italia; guárdense como las más ricas prendas de poesía que tiene España'" (Cervantes 171) (—All three of those books—said the priest—are the best written in Spanish in heroic verse, and can compete with the most famous from Italy; keep them as Spain's crown jewels of poetry).
2. For "Poeta / Anti poeta," see Canto I in Vicente Huidobro's *Altazor* (2003: 34), and for "antipoeta y mago," see Canto IV (94). For Huidobro's all-caps manifesto and his further declarations on the dangers of the poetic, see *The Selected Poetry of Vicente Huidobro*, ed. David M. Guss (1981: 76). Huidobro's prose statements are translated into English from his *Manifestes*, a volume written in French (the French not included in *The Selected Poetry*) and published in Paris in 1925.
3. See Canto III of *Altazor* in Huidobro (2003: 74–75); *The Selected Poetry* (Huidobro 1981: 2–3), and *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 68). The complete phrases in Spanish for the quotes or paraphrases from "El espejo de agua" are: "El poeta es un pequeño Dios" and "el adjetivo, cuando no da vida, mata." The complete line from *Altazor* is: "Manicura de la lengua es el poeta."
4. See Huidobro, *The Selected Poetry* 78: "The poet will no longer imitate nature, for he doesn't allow himself the right to plagiarize God"; and *Altazor*, (Huidobro 2003: 114–15, 70–71, and 68–69: "Jugamos fuera del tiempo"; "fuera del mundo cotidiano"; "Y el árbol se posará sobre la tórtala"; "La flor se comerá a la abeja." The first sentence in English is translated from *Manifestes*, which Antonio de Undurraga considers "el verdadero evangelio de la teoría creacionista" (173) (the true gospel of creationist theory).
5. Nicanor Parra's view of Huidobro as a self-styled antipoet is complex, even ambiguous. On one occasion, Parra stated that "Fue Vicente Huidobro el que me colgó ese sambenito del antipoemista" (55) (Vicente Huidobro was the one who hung on me that infamous antipoemist tag). This sentence originally appeared in "Nicanor Parra nos habla un poco de sus anticosas," an interview in *El día* from 1986; it was later reprinted in a special issue of Santiago's *The Clinic* devoted to Parra and his antipoetry. On the other hand, Parra declares in "Antipoeta Vicente Huidobro?" section 61 of his "Also Sprach Altazor," in *Discursos de sobremesa* (2006), that the notion that Huidobro was an antipoet is news to him, that he understood that someone else had invented antipoetry, meaning himself. With intentional irony, he concludes section 61 by cautioning the reader against believing Parra and Ignacio Valente, the latter a regular literary critic for Chile's *El Mercurio* who from early on and up to the present day has praised antipoetry as Parra's original contribution to world letters.
6. For the Huidobro claim that he was the only singer of the century, see *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 130–31).
7. A few of Parra's later volumes include: *Versos de salón* (1962), *Artefactos* (1972), *Sermones y prédicas del Cristo de Elqui* (1977), *Chistes parRa desorientar a la policía* (1983), *Ecopoemas* (1983), and *Antipoems: How to look better & feel great*, a bilingual edition with translations by Liz Werner (2004). Selections from all the above collections originally published in Spanish only can be found in Parra's *Antipoems: New and Selected*, a bilingual edition edited by David Unger (1985).

8. See note 5 above.
9. This is the Henry Reeve first English translation of de Tocqueville's book, which appeared in 1840, the same year as the publication of the original in French.
10. As translated from the French, Huidobro's pronouncement reads: "The poem, such as it is presented here, is not realistic, but human. It is not realistic, but it becomes reality" (Huidobro 1981: 78).
11. Huidobro's lines are from Canto III of *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 74–75). Parra's lines are from section eleven of "Also Sprach Altazor," in *Discursos de sobremesa*, 117; the English translation is from *After-Dinner Declarations*, trans. Dave Oliphant (191).
12. Huidobro's lines are from Canto IV of *Altazor* (Huidobro 98–99). Parra's lines are from his "Discurso fúnebre" (Funeral Address), in *Poems and Antipoems*, a bilingual edition edited by Miller Williams (104–05).
13. Parra opens "Also Sprach Altazor" by asking in section one "Que sería de Chile sin Huidobro / [. . .] Desde luego no habría libertad de expresión / Todos estaríamos escribiendo Sonetos / Odas elementales / O gemidos / Alabado sea el Santísimo!" (Where would Chile be without Huidobro [. . .] For certain there would be no freedom of expression / We would all be writing Sonnets / Elemental Odes / Or moans / Blessed be the Most Holy!). The Huidobro line appears in *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 92); Parra's lines are from his *Discursos de sobremesa* (107); English translation from *After-Dinner Declarations* (171).
14. Parra studied physics both at Brown and Oxford universities (or was supposed to at the latter but on discovering Shakespeare he devoted himself to the Bard's poetry) and taught physics at the University of Chile.
15. "La poesía terminó conmigo" is also included in Parra's *Poems and Antipoems* (86–87), and in *Antipoems: New and Selected* (42–45).
16. See Canto I of *Altazor* ("Los ríos y las selvas me preguntan / ¿Qué tal cómo está Ud.?" (Huidobro 2003: 36–37). The Parra poem is included in *Antipoems: New and Selected* (98–99).
17. The Parra statement is one of his "artefactos" (artifacts) on display for a celebration of the poet (since the thrust of the argument discusses both poets in the context of antipoetry) and his work, held in Santiago in August 2001. The proceedings from the celebration, entitled *Ciclo Homenaje en torno a la figura y obra de Nicanor Parra: Coloquio Internacional de escritores y académicos*, were published in 2002 by the Chilean Ministry of Education, and a catalog of the exhibit of Parra's "artefactos" was issued as *Obras públicas* (2006), n.p. Parra's "Homenaje a Huidobro" is not included in the catalog, but it is quoted in Roberto Bolaño's article, "El exilio y la literatura: Discurso en Viena."
18. See "Manifiesto," in Nicanor Parra's *Obras completas & algo + (1935–1972)* (143); and "Letters From a Poet Who Sleeps in His Chair," in Parra's *Antipoems: New and Selected*, (94–95).
19. The subtitle of *Altazor* is *o El viaje en paracaídas (or The Parachute Voyage)*. There are a number of shipwrecks mentioned in the poem, as in the line "Y caí de naufragio en naufragio de horizonte en horizonte" (And I fell from shipwreck into shipwreck horizon to horizon), to which Parra may be alluding. Parra may also be thinking of the line "Colgado al paracaídas de sus propios prejuicios" (Hanging in the parachute of his own prejudices). For the Huidobro lines, see *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 102–103, and 20–21). For Parra's lines, see *Discursos de sobremesa* (108); *After-Dinner Declarations* (173).
20. For the history of Teniente (Lieutenant) Bello, see Francisco Mouat's *Chilenos de raza* (103–129). On page 124, Mouat reports that Lieutenant Bello was lost along

the route between Culitrín and Cartagena, the latter, as Parra well knew, the home of Huidobro at the end of his life and now his burial site, which features a mural, including an image of the mill that turns out words, images, and emotional states in Canto V of *Altazor*, and an inscription bearing a variation of the following line, also from Canto V: “Se abre la tumba y al fondo se ve el mar” (The tomb opens and in its depths we see the sea). See *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 108–09). To view the tomb and mural, see the following blog: caltobris.blogspot.com/2007/10/tumbas.html. Parra refers to Huidobro’s tomb in section sixty-three of “Also Sprach Altazor,” which will be discussed in a subsequent paragraph.

21. Parra’s “prepared” coffin (a la John Cage) is reproduced in his *Obras públicas* (n.p).
22. Juan Antonio Ramírez’s original review appeared in *Diario El País* for May 12, 2001, and is reprinted as something of a foreword to Parra’s *Obras públicas*.
23. A third facsimile edition of the work was issued in 1995 by Chile’s Editorial Universitaria. In an asterisked note to a letter Huidobro wrote to actor Douglas Fairbanks, he traces his line on the maternal side from Alfonso X el Sabio, “que como todos saben era tataranieto del Cid” (who as all know was the great-great-grandson of the Cid), to his grandfather, Domingo Fernández Concha. Huidobro goes on to comment that “Me sentí nieto del Cid, me ví sentado en sus rodillas y acariciando esa noble barba tan crecida que nadie se atrevió a tocar jamás. Si mi abuelo era o no descendiente de reyes no lo sé ni me importa. Lo que sí puedo afirmar es que nunca he encontrado un hombre con más porte y ademanes de rey que él” (I felt myself the grandson of the Cid, I saw myself seated on his knees and stroking that noble beard so long that no one ever dared to touch it. If my grandfather was or was not a descendant of kings I neither know nor does it matter to me. What I can affirm is that never have I found a man with greater bearing and manners of a king than he). See Huidobro, “Carta a Mr. Douglas Fairbanks,” in *Mío Cid Campeador* (1995); the asterisked note following Huidobro’s letter to Fairbanks is unpaginated.
24. Parra seems to have in mind Keats’s “negative capability” as one of poetry’s *modi operandi* that Huidobro rejects. However, there is a good deal of evidence in *Altazor* of Huidobro’s having adopted such a Keatsian mode or poetic frame of mind. Examples appear especially in Canto V: “Y tengo una experiencia de mariposa milenaria” (And I’m having a millennial butterfly experience); “Y he aquí que ahora me diluyo en múltiples cosas / Soy luciérnaga y voy iluminando las ramas de la selva” (And here I must dissolve myself into many things / I’m a firefly lighting the forest branches); “Ahora soy rosal y hablo con lenguaje de rosal” (Now I’m a rosebush speaking rose language); “Y luego soy pájaro / Y me disputo el día en gorjeos” (And then I’m a bird / And I argue all day in chirps). See *Altazor* (Huidobro 2003: 126–31). For the first and last translations I have preferred those in *The Selected Poetry* (139 and 143). Other examples of Huidobro’s type of metamorphosis appear in “La Poesía es un atentado celeste” (Poetry Is a Heavenly Crime): “Me estoy haciendo árbol Cuántas veces me he ido convirtiendo en otras cosas [. . .] Es doloroso y lleno de ternura” (I’m turning into a tree How often I’ve turned into other things [. . .] / It’s painful and full of tenderness). See *The Selected Poetry* (210–11).
25. The alteration to “traductor” does not appear in the printed edition of *Discursos de sobremesa*, but Parra added the “i” to “traductor” in my own copy of his book. He was apparently correcting a “typo” or had decided to make the addition, since “tra(i)ductor” is printed in *Discursos* in the phrase “Como el tra(i)ductor de Hamlet,” in section eighteen of the antipoem-speech entitled “Discurso del Bío Bío” (215). In my own copy of the book, Parra did not place parentheses around the “i.”

Works Cited

- Bolaño, Roberto. "El exilio y la literatura: Discurso en Viena." *Revista Ateneo* 15 (2001): 43.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1967.
- Huidobro, Vicente. *Altazor*. Trans. Eliot Weinberger. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003.
- _____. *Mío Cid Campeador*. Madrid: Compañía Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1929.
- _____. *Mío Cid Campeador*. Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1995.
- _____. *The Selected Poetry*. Ed. David M. Guss. New York: New Directions, 1981.
- Huidobro, Vicente, and Antonio de Undurraga. *Poesía y prosa*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1957.
- Mouat, Francisco. *Chilenos de raza*. Santiago: El Mercurio Aguilar, 2004.
- Parra, Nicanor. *After-Dinner Declarations*. Trans. Dave Oliphant. Austin, TX: Host Publications, 2009.
- _____. *Antipoems: How to look better & feel great*. Trans. Liz Werner. New York: New Directions, 2004.
- _____. *Antipoems: New and Selected*. Ed. David Unger. New York: New Directions, 1985.
- _____. *Discursos de sobremesa*. Santiago: Ediciones Diego Portales, 2006.
- _____. *Obras completas & algo + (1935–1972)*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2006.
- _____. *Obra pública*. Santiago: W.R.S. Ediciones, 2006.
- _____. *Poemas y antipoemas*. Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1954.
- _____. *Poems and Antipoems*. Ed. Miller Williams. New York: New Directions, 1966.
- _____. *Versos de salón*. Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1962.
- The Clinic*. (Oct. 21, 2004): 55.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Vol. 2. New York: Schocken Books, 1961.
- Zerán, Faride. *La guerrilla literaria: Huidobro, de Rokha, Neruda*. Santiago: Ediciones Bat, 1992.

Oliphant, Dave. "Huidobro and Parra: World-Class Antipoets." *Huidobro's Futurity: Twenty-First Century Approaches*. Ed. Luis Correa-Díaz and Scott Weintraub. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 6 (Spring 2010): 136–151.
http://hispanicissues.umn.edu/Spring2010/07_Huidobro_Oliphant.pdf
