



Poemas Humanos

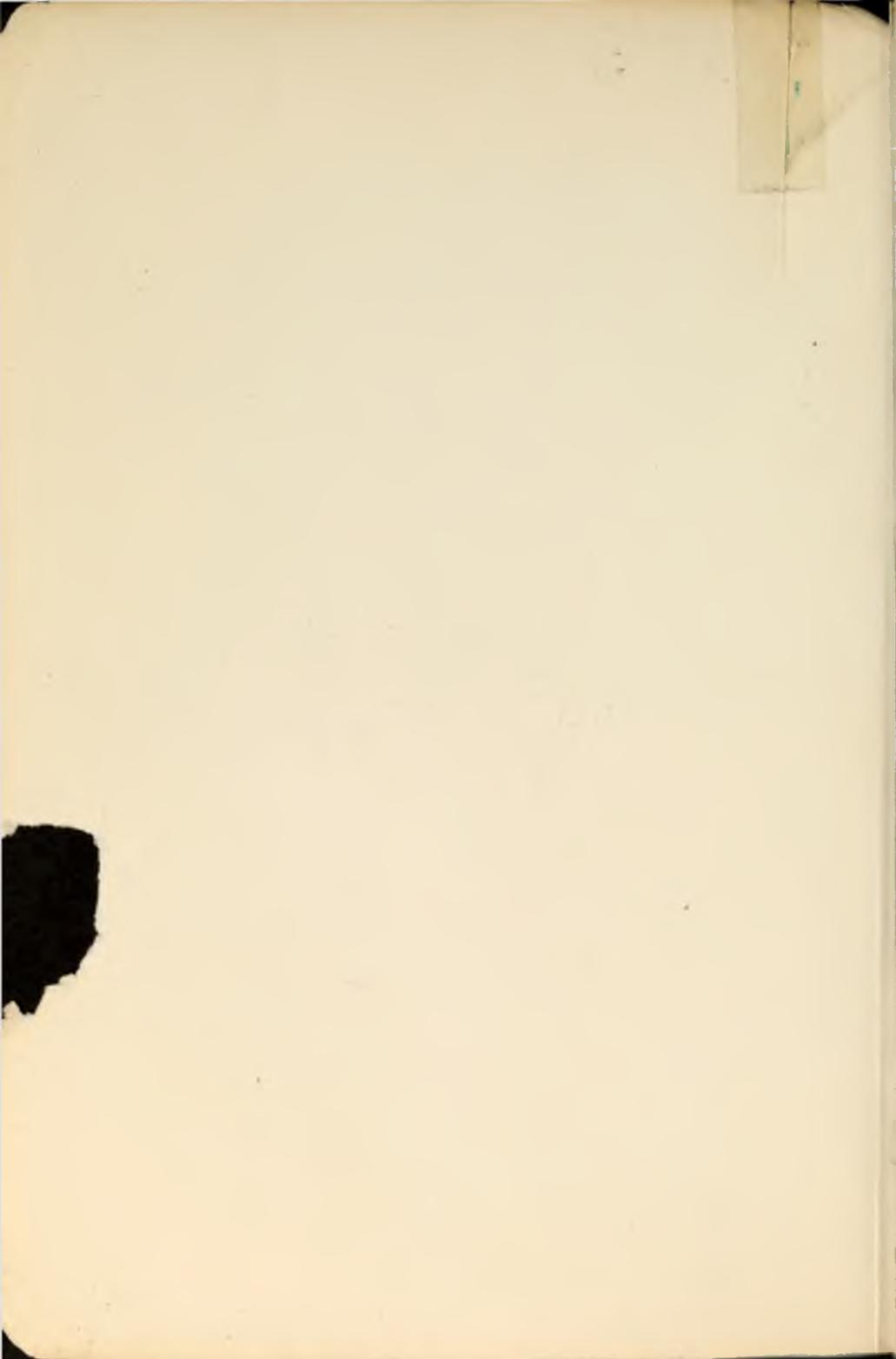
Human Poems

by César Vallejo

a bilingual edition

translated by

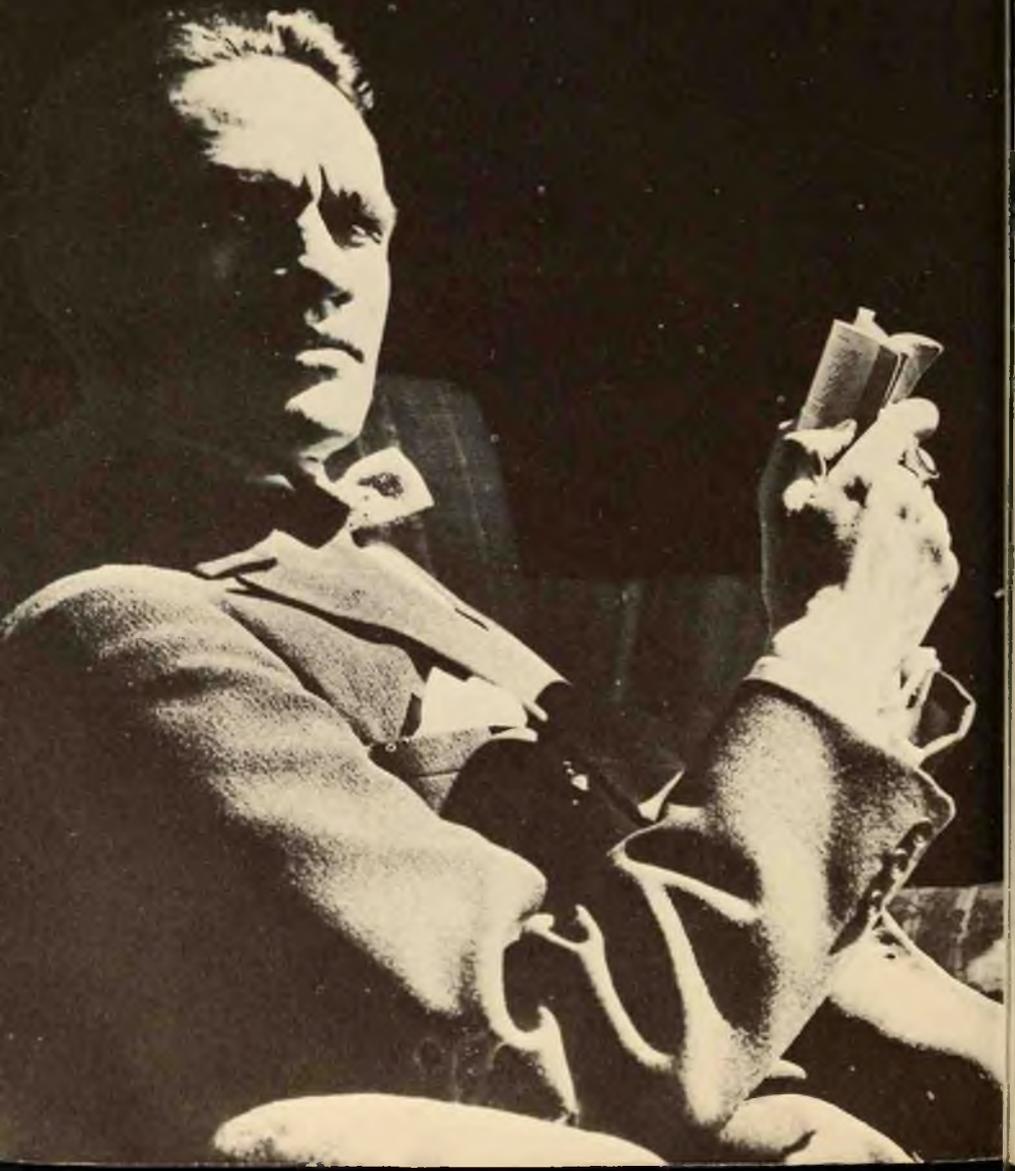
Clayton Eshleman



Poemas Humanos  
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# Poemas Humanos



# Human Poems

by César Vallejo

Translated by Clayton Eshleman

Grove Press, Inc., New York

*Editor's Note:* The dates that appear in brackets after certain of the poems are estimated dates of composition. Those dates that are unbracketed are, as far as can be determined, the dates Vallejo put to each poem upon its completion:

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## Translator's Foreword

### 1. *Biographical Information*

On April 15, 1938, having swept down the Ebro valley, the Spanish Nationalists reached the Mediterranean. In the film *To Die in Madrid* there is a scene of the troops frolicking in the surf. On the same day, at dawn, one of the greatest poets of the modern era cried out in delirium from his deathbed in a Parisian clinic, "I am going to Spain! I want to go to Spain!"

César Abraham Vallejo was born in the medieval Andean town of Santiago de Chuco, in northern Peru, on March 16, 1892. The youngest of eleven children, César grew up in a home saturated in religious devotion; his family openly hoped he would become a priest. Juan Larrea and Juan Espejo, friends and biographers of the poet, speak of the profound anguish in Vallejo caused by the conflict between the spiritual and the worldly — especially in regard to his erotic experiences — which had its roots in the deep idealism, the sense of sin, good, and evil, of such Catholic upbringing.

When he was eighteen, Vallejo went to Trujillo for the first time and enrolled in the university as a student in *Letras*. He soon ran out of money and went to work in the mining town of Quiruvilca. A year later, with family aid, he again tried the university, this time in Lima. It turned out that his family could not support him, and 1911 and 1912 find him working as a tutor for the owner's children in a sierra hacienda. With savings, he entered the university at Trujillo in 1913 and received his Bachelor's degree two years later. It was on the hacienda that Vallejo, whose grandmothers were pure Indian,

saw Indians flogged and working for a few cents a day, and in Quiruvilca that he found inspiration for his novel, *El Tungsteno*, written in 1931. The major development in his life, that of the emergence of the engaged European Communist from the expatriate Peruvian poet, may well have turned on what he saw and felt years before.

One of Vallejo's hacienda roommates relates that on Sunday, their only day off, Vallejo would go for walks and read instead of getting drunk with the other employees, and that often he would show this roommate his first attempts at poetry. It was during his university days in Trujillo, however, that he really began to read and was introduced by Antenor Orrego, a journalist and the local intellectual guide, to others his own age, some of whom were to become nationally famous in literature, journalism, and politics. Orrego, who was then working on the newspaper *La Reforma*, recalls: "Along about November or December of 1914 Vallejo approached me bringing a notebook of poems. I can't remember how many, certainly no more than twenty-five or thirty poems. It was then I became aware of all the reading he was doing on his own, of all Spanish literature from the Golden Age on, and that his poetic imitations went back as far as Gonzalo de Berceo. There were magnificent imitations of Quevedo as well as Lope, Tirso and many others." During his student years, Vallejo supported himself teaching grade school part-time in Trujillo; in later years, no matter how complex and impassioned his thought became, it was often conveyed through a grade-school teacher's knowledge of the human body, mathematics, and grammar.

By 1916 Vallejo was regularly publishing poetry in Orrego's *La Reforma*, poetry that was later printed in his first book, *Los Heraldos Negros*. He was reading Emerson, Unamuno, Darío, Nervo, Herrera y Reissig and, in translation, the French Symbolists. He managed to get himself attacked by conservative Trujillan society for satirizing them in a sonnet, and throughout 1916 and 1917 he was tied up in anguished love affairs. A photo taken at this time shows Vallejo's high Indian cheekbones and heavy black hair — a very handsome face.

In 1918 he went to Lima and became known to some distinguished men of letters, one of whom, Abraham Valdelomar,

agreed to write the prologue to his first book. He continued to teach grade school. When *Los Heraldos Negros* appeared in the summer of 1919 it was received politely and somewhat enthusiastically; the impression is that at the time Vallejo had filled to brimming the antiquated forms literary society found acceptable — to continue to push his talent in its own directions would soon bring him hostility and silence.

In 1920, returning home after two years' absence, he passed with a friend through Huamanchuco (where he had attended high school) and visited with his brother. Vallejo and his friend edited a law paper and with their pay went off to a saloon. They came back drunk. Vallejo had been invited that evening to read in his old high school, and after reciting a poem he waited for the applause. When there was none, he became furious with the audience's attitude and said, "Since you don't applaud me, little do I care for your applause now that the intellectuals of the country applaud me. One day my poetry will make me greater than even Rubén Darío — I'll know the pride of seeing America prostrated before my feet." This caused a scandal in town, during which Vallejo rode off for Santiago to attend the annual festival of the patron saint.

He rode into a town feud that had been smoldering since the last elections. On the last Sunday of the festival violence broke out — a deputy was killed and the general store, owned by a family whose political ties were opposed to those of the Vallejo family, was burned to the ground. Vallejo, who was helping the Sub-prefect write the legal information about the killing, was blamed as an accomplice in the burning and later, in court, as the "intellectual instigator." He was found guilty and spent 105 days in a Trujillo jail after which he was forced to live in Trujillo six months. The whole business embittered him terribly.

Before serving his sentence, Vallejo had hidden in a cottage belonging to Orrego; there he began the book that for many critics breaks Latin American poetry out of its nineteenth-century tradition and links it to a twentieth-century European context. In 1922, having submitted a manuscript—to be printed with his own funds—called "Craneos de Bronce" which was to be printed under the name of César Perú, Vallejo was scoffed at by friends who said he was affecting an imitation of

D'Annunzio and Anatole France. He decided to use his own name. Then he was told that the first pages of the book had been printed and a name change would cost him extra, "*tres libras*." Apparently he didn't have three dollars, for Espejo relates: "Vallejo felt mortified. Several times he repeated *tres, tres, tres*, with that insistence he had for repeating words and deforming them, *tresss, triss, triesss, tril, trilsss*. He stammered and in the lisp came out *trilssce . . . trilce? trilce?* He hesitated for a moment, then exclaimed: 'O.k., I'll use my own name but the book will be called *Trilce*.'" "

*Trilce* contains seventy-seven poems and to anyone who has read Latin American poetry written before it, it is a very strange book indeed — it seems to come out of nowhere. André Coyné, Vallejo's most astute critic, states: "In *Trilce* there is no universe, nor objects, except those furtively introduced across the unadorned and familiar world of the hearth and love; we are presented only with rapid sensations, glimpsed in a semiconscious or semivigilant state, and (now that the eye hardly has a role) received like shocks and indicated solely by a painful resonance always without resolution — a resonance that is internal, visceral. . . . Poems that hardly are poems, traced on the birthlike and insistent talk of childhood or fever, each stanza organizing on the basis of a separate intuition, for the poet is always at the mercy of the sudden attack of this or that term or the pressing in of anxiety."

After the publication of *Trilce*, Vallejo continued to live in Lima. In the spring of 1923 he was notified that his teaching position had been eliminated. At about the same time he was offered a post as the Lima correspondent for a Trujillo newspaper, and when he found that he could fulfill the post in Europe, he made plans to leave. On a June Sunday, with his friend Julio Galvez and a hundred and fifty dollars, he embarked third-class for France. He never returned to Peru.

At this point in César Vallejo's life all biographical continuity ends. The rather sketchy knowledge that we have concerning the European years (1923–1938) is based on information from Georgette de Vallejo, the poet's widow. Thus, it is hoped, the reader can at least get a sense of the poet's full but frustrating life in Europe.

1923 and 1924 seem to have been the years that Vallejo nearly starved in Paris. In 1923, he and Galvez walked the streets looking for bottles to cash in. The next year, the Costa Rican sculptor, Max Jiménez, left them his studio. Vallejo translated a book on Peru into Spanish for 1000 francs. He met the painter Juan Gris, Juan Larrea, and the poet Vicente Huidobro. In 1925, Vallejo found his first stable job with Le Bureau des Grands Journaux Ibero-américains, and began a long collaboration with *Mundial*, a Lima weekly. During this year he made his first trip to Spain where he received a small writer's grant through the Peruvian Embassy in Madrid.

In 1926 he lived in the Hôtel Richelieu in Paris and went to exhibitions, concerts, and cafés, and met Antonin Artaud and Waldo Frank. With Juan Larrea, he co-edited a magazine, *Favorables Paris Poema*, which published contributions by Huidobro, Neruda, Reverdy, Tzara, and Gris. He became a weekly columnist for *Variedades*, published in Lima, and an essay of his, *Poesía Nueva*, published in *Amauta*, introduced French Surrealist poets to Peruvian readers. In 1927, in the first of a number of political gestures, he left his post at Le Bureau, and an essay, *Contra el secreto Profesional*, appeared in *Variedades*. In this essay Vallejo discussed the double failure of South American poets to use European influences and to find an expression indigenous to their own people. At this period the idea that lay under all of Vallejo's journalism was the conviction that poetry must become a direct language, freed from traditional devices.

In 1928 he read much Marxist literature, and attended lectures on dialectical materialism, living off odd jobs. He lived, for the summer, in the town of Ris-Oranges, and in September left for Russia. He returned in November and began living with Georgette Philippart. In December, along with Mariátegui, he broke with the Peruvian revolutionary movement, APRA, in which they detected a fascist base. The next year, 1929, his Marxist studies continuing, he taught in worker cells and decided to publish no more poetry in the belief that the artist's role was, for the time being, economic. In September he again journeyed to Russia where, in Moscow, he interviewed Mayakovsky. On his way back to Paris he traveled through Berlin,

Vienna, Florence, Rome, and Nice. That November he worked on a notebook of meditations on Marxist theory and its application to the Soviet Union: he was now committed to Communism.

Early in 1930, a Madrid magazine, *Bolívar*, carried a piece of his reportage on Russia, later to be incorporated into *Rusia en 1931*. He wrote his first drama, *Mampar*. In May he and Mme Vallejo traveled to Spain where he met such writers as Salinas, Alberti, Unamuno, and Gerardo Diego. The critic José Bergamín wrote an introduction to the second edition of *Trilce* (which appeared in July). Pierre Lagarde, writing of the volume, said: "Vallejo has invented Surrealism before the surrealists." In June the couple returned to Paris and Vallejo began his second play, *Moscú contra Moscú*. The weekly meetings that he attended in L'Humanité book shop were watched by the police and in December Vallejo was ordered to leave France in three days. Again, he returned to Spain.

In 1931, in Madrid, he wrote the novel, *El Tungsteno*, and translated novels by Marcel Aymé and Henri Barbusse. The Monarchy had just fallen and the Republic proclaimed. It was now that Vallejo officially joined the Communist party and became one of the founders of Spanish Communist cells. For the first time in his life, he was well received in important literary circles, and frequently met with Bergamín, Alberti, and Lorca. La Editorial Ulises published *Rusia en 1931* in July, and a second and third edition followed shortly. In Moscow a literary conference was organized, based on the book; Vallejo was temporarily famous. In October he traveled in Russia and took part in the International Congress of Authors in Moscow. He arrived back in Madrid penniless, and with a notebook which eventually became *Rusia ante el Segundo Plan Quinquenal*. He wrote another play, *Lockout*, and the story, "Paco Yunque." Notwithstanding his relative success with the Russian travel book, he could not find a publisher for his plays or stories.

Mme Vallejo returned to Paris in January, 1932, to arrange for Vallejo's return and found their apartment ransacked by the police. The poet stayed at a pension in Madrid. Within the space of a month he submitted his collection of essays, *El Arte y La Revolución*, to a publisher, and it was refused; he sub-

mitted *Moscú contra Moscú* and *Lockout*, and they were refused; Lorca offered to read *Mampar* at the Cervantes Theater, but before the reading, the theater closed; Vallejo offered *Rusia ante el Segundo Plan Quinquenal*, still in progress, to two publishers, and it was refused; Lorca read *Moscú contra Moscú* to a producer who told him it was unpresentable, and Lorca proposed to read it to another producer. But Vallejo wanted to get back to Paris, and on hearing that a resident permit had been obtained, arrived there in February with nothing but the clothes he was wearing.

In 1933, he and Mme Vallejo were living in the Hôtel Garibaldi, and Vallejo was revising poems. He also worked on more plays, compiled a second volume of studies and essays, *Contra el secreto Profesional*, and published, in *Germinal*, a seven-part article, *¿Qué pasa en el Perú?*. He wrote, in 1934, a satire of Peruvian political life, *Los Hermanos Colacho*. His precarious financial situation and bad luck continued throughout 1935, and the couple took a room on the Boulevard Raspail, while Vallejo searched for work.

1936 found Vallejo teaching Spanish. He published *El hombre y Dios en la escultura incaica* in *Beaux-Arts*. He and Mme Vallejo moved here and there, finally settling in the Hôtel du Maine. The Fascist uprising in Spain in July stirred him to a flurry of activity. He attended meetings and assemblies in Paris, canvassed the streets to collect money, and at night waited in Montparnasse station for telegrams from Madrid. He soon left for Spain, extremely upset, and traveled to Barcelona and Madrid. At the end of December he returned to Paris, completely absorbed in the Spanish cause.

In 1937 he founded, with others, the Comité Ibero-americana para la defensa de la República Española, and its publicity bulletin, "Nuestra España." To raise money he wrote a film script, *Charlot contra Chaplin*. He left again in July for Spain, which by now was deep in civil war, and took part in the Segundo Congreso Internacional de Escritores para la defensa de la Cultura which met in Valencia, Madrid, and Barcelona, and closed in Paris. On this final return from Spain, the dam broke: Vallejo wrote *La Piedra Cansada*, a fifteen-scene tragedy, and then, after nearly fifteen years of poetic silence, turned all his energy toward revising, finishing, and writing the poems that

were to eventually make up *Poemas Humanos*. This tremendous labor of writing the drama and the majority of the ninety-four poems of *Poemas Humanos* took place roughly between August and early December. Either during this time or just after, he wrote a sheaf of fifteen poems inspired by the Republican cause, *España, aparte de mí este Cáliz*, which was printed by Republican soldiers. The entire edition was lost in the disaster of Cataluña.

The years of strain and deprivation, psychic illness over the fall of the Republic, and exhaustion from the pace of the previous year, finally, in 1938, took their toll. In March Vallejo was in bed with a constant fever. X rays and analysis showed no cause for alarm, but he could not get out of bed and his fever persisted. The Peruvian Embassy had him moved to the Arago clinic where, despite medical attention, his condition steadily worsened. On March 29, he dictated to Mme Vallejo: "Whatever may be the cause I have to defend before God, beyond death I have a defender: God." On April 14, he lost consciousness, medical analysis still having shown no cause for his illness. The hospital records stated that his death, at 9:30 A.M., Good Friday, April 15, was the effect of an acute intestinal infection, but friends and other authorities have claimed that the cause of death was never determined. His body was buried on April 19, in Montrouge cemetery.

In 1939 his widow brought out *Poemas Humanos* in a limited edition. In 1940, the Spanish Civil War sheaf was published. As incredible as it may seem, much of the rest of Vallejo's writing — which as far I can judge comes to four full-length dramas, two novels, two volumes of essays, a film script, a half-dozen notebooks, and a volume of miscellaneous prose — remains in manuscript.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This situation was partially remedied with the 1967 publication of *Novelas y Cuentos Completos* by Francisco Moncloa Editores, Lima, Peru. This volume contains the collection of short stories, *Escalas Melografiadas*; the novels, *El Tungsteno* and *Hacia el reino de los Sciris*; the novella, *Fabla Salvaje*; the short story, "Paco Yunque"; and the fragment of a novel, *Sabiduría*. There are also included four previously unpublished stories. In 1965, there was also published in Lima his second book on Russia, *Rusia ante el Segundo Plan Quinquenal*.

## 2. César Vallejo: Black Stone on a White Stone

César Vallejo in black overcoat leans, or rests, against a lichen-mottled boulder, mostly white, or suggesting that contrast in Juan Larrea's photo, 1926, Paris, bosque de Fontainebleau. He appears to be in meditation — the darkness where are the eyes suggests a death mask — the head is starved — hair too high and feeling too airy and brushed back to be sensual. His shoes and socks suggest foreign students — he is at home mostly symbolically. He died in 1938, in Paris, and the actual death mask is pitted and full fleshed.

It is difficult to know enough about Vallejo. Most of his writings, as previously noted, are not available in any language. His widow, Georgette Vallejo, who has lived for many years in Lima on a pension given her by the Peruvian government, holds much of his writing — which includes critical essays, drama (influenced by Antonin Artaud and studied by García Lorca), journals, a novel, and probably more poetry than the four published volumes which are said to constitute the *obra poetica*.<sup>2</sup> There is also a great deal — 200 articles at least — of journalism buried in the archives of the Peruvian National Library, most of which Vallejo wrote while in Europe and mailed back to Peruvian weeklies. This journalism constitutes an intellectual biography and I have read very little of it. The entire biography, or *vida*, is cloaked in mystery.

Vallejo speaks very naturally in the tone and compassion of Jesus in *Poemas Humanos*; there is almost nothing literary about his Christianity — he lived it, dreadfully, died on Good Friday and a few months before his death called his last sheaf of poems *Spain, let this Cup pass from Me*. There is no satis-

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the second volume of her *Diary* Anaïs Nin remarks: "Gonzalo thinks about death. 'And suddenly the heart stops beating.' He tells me how Vallejo never showed his poetry, that he had tons and tons of it all over his room that nobody had ever read. And that he told in one poem, how he would die on All Saints' Day, and then that day came and he did die." (Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume 2, 1935-1939*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.)

Gonzalo is Gonzalo More, another Peruvian, and one of Vallejo's best friends.

factory explanation of his death. One of his critics, Xavier Abril, reproduces a photo of the death certificate that states death was due to an "acute intestinal infection." Mme Vallejo claims this is false information, and that Vallejo died from a reoccurring case of malaria. There is no evidence I know of concerning this. At the end of his essay,<sup>3</sup> H. R. Hays notes: "In the larger sense he was struck down by hunger and by Spain's agony." There is certainly truth in these words: "The Starving Man's Rack," written during the first years Vallejo lived in Paris, records a hunger that while physical is spiritual to the extent that it could, and most probably did, damage the poet's body. Vallejo's sickness often seems rooted in his stomach, to arise from the matrix of his being, a "slip-up" as he calls it, in the very framework of things. This framework was also social; Vallejo believed in the Russian Revolution to such an extent that when he extended his belief to Spain and then saw that belief crumble in the mid-thirties (in 1937 he spent a month traveling in Spain from city to city while the country was literally convulsing in flames), something collapsed in his own constitution — Spain's *agon* became his own in the *España* sheaf, and too in this book, completed probably before the Spanish Civil War poems were done — or, I should guess, overlapped with them. But in *Poemas Humanos* this struggle is interiorized and then projected to all men, in Vallejo's own person, as contradiction and violence therein. Only one of *Poemas Humanos* is overtly political, "Angelic Greeting," written in the early thirties at the height of his Marxist conversion. Even then he was not much off his own center: he believes and doesn't believe; revolution, he says, through its violent means of betrayal is and is not a solution; perhaps it is the best non-solution. For in Vallejo there is no solution other than death, as "solution" dissolving all. All other solutions as such fade, in *Poemas Humanos*, before all-powerful death; it is as if man never dies but lives eternally at the edge of death. Vallejo is the great poet of the End and in this respect he reminds one of Baudelaire — he is filled with it, an anguish, a Black Midas.

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<sup>3</sup> H. R. Hays, "The Passion of César Vallejo," *New Directions Annual*, Number 15, 1955.

I felt at first that Vallejo's words could be improved on in English — the first three versions of *Human Poems* are shot through with arbitrary words and line breaks. This was Vallejo's failure to budge. What I bit at, at teeth. He, in contrast to someone like Neruda, would not allow himself to be played with unless he was fingered with devotion — as in the case of Blake, the poem had been written selflessly; while Vallejo and Neruda had crossed at the juncture of the South American Surreal (Vallejo: *Trilce*; Neruda: *Residencia en la Tierra*, I), Neruda found in the third book of *Residencia* the key to becoming *the* twentieth-century South American Poet: the revolutionary stance which always changes with the tides of time. With that recognition and its acceptance Neruda became a figure — or let us say his detachment worked. Vallejo, in spite of his travels from country to country, never could come to terms with one system, and it seems to be to his benefit, for he has produced a poetry dense in texture that holds his feelings and, in reading, releases them.

I translated and lived with Neruda's poetry for a couple of years before encountering Vallejo, and I would like to make this point: that in Vallejo, and *not* in Neruda, the entire consciousness of modern South American man is suffered and partially redeemed; Neruda stays within the bounds of what we (North Americans and Europeans) have expected from South America — the anaconda in the Brazilian swamp, *contra Yanqui*, gorgeous and metrical; the *Poemas Humanos* of Vallejo are still in South America *not* read, because the consciousness is *altered*. Vallejo attacks at root the Catholic-racist-colonial culture that many of the best in South America are still in the nets of. In Vallejo the amount of physical suffering is the alteration that it seeks; he poses the problem for the poets who follow him even more crucially than Blake: given the fact that man suffers and that I, as a poet, am always responsible for his suffering, what can I do to lessen this suffering — *as a poet*? Is there a point at which the true poet is no longer a literary man but resumes his place as primal Adam? At the end of *Jerusalem* Blake overthrows all outward ceremony and envisions the apocalypse in self-sacrifice and forgiveness; the poetic act becomes the human act — I forgive you! said with all the heart is greater than *writing* the poem —

it is the poem; Vallejo's sickness is not a matter of literary concern — it leads directly to Wilhelm Reich. This Peruvian, revealing the rack in the foundation of his armature, tells us: You must get well.

So was I charged. Utter enlightenment working out over the years. I asked others to read each draft — or strata, as I now call them — of the work. The deeper I went the more literally I worked — I hope I have made a good literal version of *Poemas Humanos*. Nothing to despise about that word. Better, I decided, at about the fifth stratum, to stick with what is awkward at times when it is written by a man trying very hard not to deceive himself. Zukofsky's work on Catullus gave me a certain courage to try out unusual constructions: the crispness and precision of Cid Corman's handling of Montale and Basho gave me a sound-texture to strike at. Thank you Allen, thank you Cid, thank you Louis, thank you Rafael, thank you Claudia, thank you Sidney, thank you Olga, thank you Octavio, thank you Margaret, thank you Vinholes, thank you Maureen — Maureen Maurer — who has spent two years with this manuscript, checking it with me and even more importantly checking it with Mme Vallejo, some of whose suggestions have been incorporated into the final draft; and thank you Mme Vallejo.

At this point some textual details should be mentioned. *Poemas Humanos* was published in an edition of 250 copies in Paris by Georgette Vallejo the year after Vallejo's death, and from her viewpoint is all the poetry he wrote (along with the Spanish Civil War sheaf of fifteen poems) in Europe. Apparently Vallejo intended a collection of poems to be called *Poemas Humanos* and suggested this as a title to his wife some time before his death. The poems that make up the manuscript were left in work sheets, and were copied for publication by Mme Vallejo; thus there are words and punctuation that are her guesses. It is exceedingly difficult to determine how accurate the Spanish text is because no editor or translator has yet had access to the originals. This basic problem is made even more complicated by the fact that printing errors made in the first edition were copied in subsequent editions and new errors were made: some of Vallejo's

intentional misspellings were corrected, periods and commas were left out, stanzas were inverted, and once one poem made of two, and once two poems made of one. I don't think it is necessary here for me to go into all of this since such work is the kind of scholarship that should have been done years ago by South American scholars. Suffice it to say that I used five editions of *Poemas Humanos*, all of which were different, in making my translation, and then in Lima I read these five editions against Mme Vallejo's corrected first edition. Thus the Spanish text in this book seems to me to be the most correct one available anywhere, but there are errors in it that will not be discovered until Vallejo's work sheets can be properly inspected.

The order of the poems in the book is also problematic. It appears that when Mme Vallejo originally copied out the poems for publication she made no attempt to arrange them with any specific order in mind, chronological or poetic. Some of the poems were dated; others were not. She now claims that these dates indicate when a poem was *finished*, not when it was *written*. That is, she would say that a certain poem was written in 1931 and then kept in work sheet until the fall of 1937 when Vallejo for the first time apparently made an effort to make a book, and revised or finished the poem he wrote in 1931. This is not clear at all, but I am recording it here as it was told me. Therefore, since Mme Vallejo did not trust the dates on fifty-two of the poems in the collection, she had them removed in 1958 when a small press, Peru Nuevo, published the book in Peru for the first time. However, the order of the poems in the book remained unchanged and the book ended, as it always had in previous editions, with the longest prose poem, "The windows have been shaken" at the end of which the author presumably dies.<sup>4</sup> The other prose poems in the collec-

<sup>4</sup> Mme Vallejo now says that all the prose poems belong to a separate collection called *Codigo Civil* written between 1923 and 1928, yet she published them as part of *Poemas Humanos* in 1939. They seem to me so much of a piece of the fabric of *Poemas Humanos* that until there is definite evidence that Vallejo intended them to be read in separate format I will consider them part of this volume.

tion were placed right before "The windows . . .," and it has always appeared that Vallejo wrote the prose poems just before he died. This is not true, nor is it a good idea not to respect Vallejo's ordering of his own life-work, i.e., his dating of poems he obviously considered finished in that gigantic autumn of his poetic consummation in 1937. When I lived in Lima I put all the dates back on the dated poems and one night cut up a copy of the book and put the poems in order. An amazing curve resulted, totally coherent, of a build in intensity through September and October into the half-dozen or so truly magnificent poems written in November. The only poem dated in December is "Sermon on Death" which seems to end that particular production. Therefore I believe the dated poems should be read in their chronological order. Of course a new problem crops up for which a solution can only be suggested in this book: What to do with the poems that have no dates on them? Undoubtedly, these undated poems were, as were many of the dated ones, worked out over a period of years (roughly, I'd say, the bulk of them, between 1931 and 1937). We know through the few available letters of the poet that he was very very sick around the end of 1924 and I am confident that the long "The windows . . ." prose poem refers to this sickness. I have used this piece as a cornerstone to build the other forty-one inexactly dated poems around, and in doing so I have taken into consideration changes in style, and Vallejo's themes. For example, the poems overtly about Peru strike me as being written fairly soon after the poet came to Europe. I am sure I have made some poor guesses and that some of the undated poems belong to the fall 1937 period. However, since such distortion seems minimal, I will elaborate no further. My work is done.

*17 January 1968*  
*New York City*

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Poemas Humanos  
Human Poems

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