

JAMES HIGGINS

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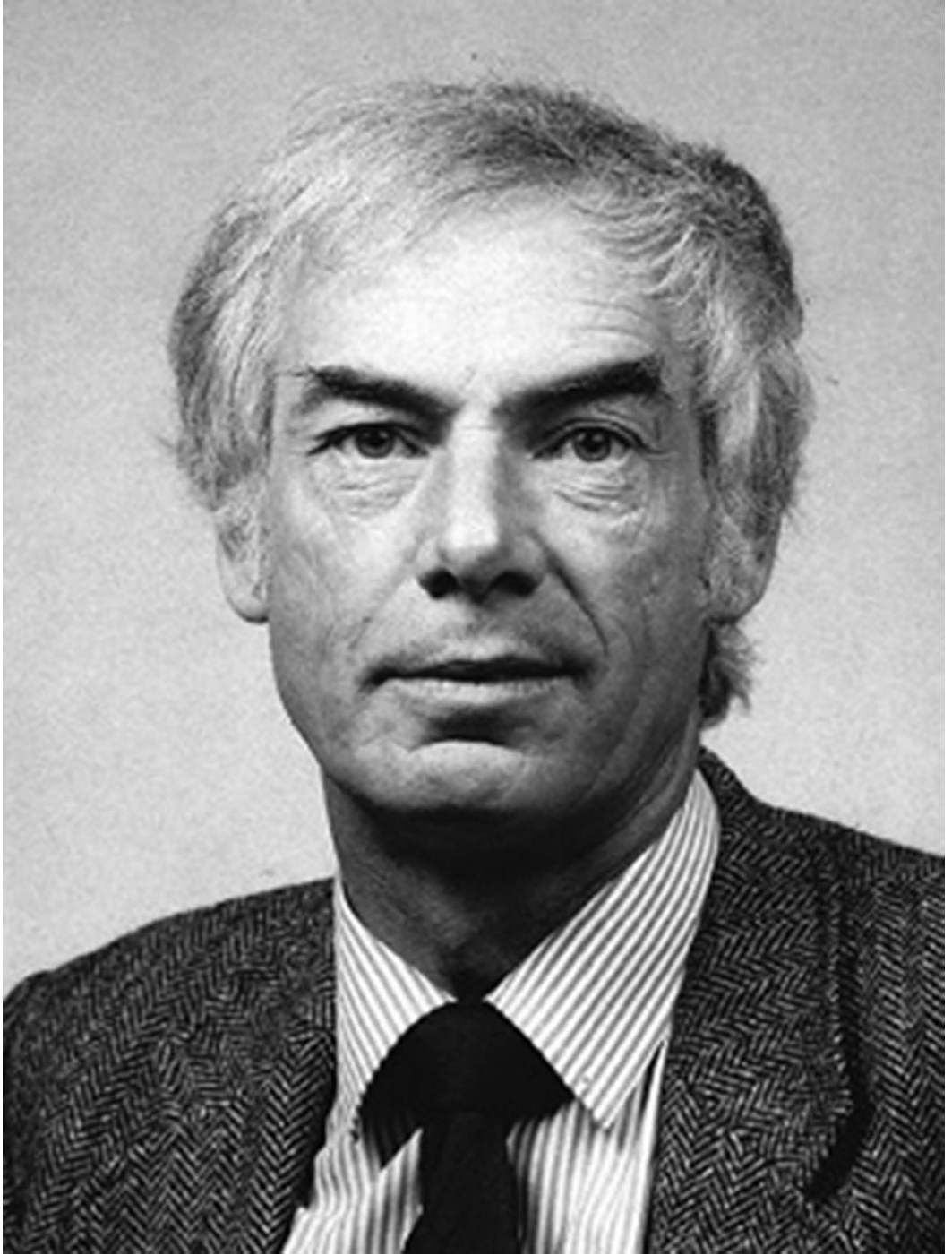
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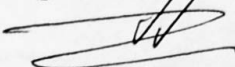
elected Fellow of the British Academy 1999

by

STEPHEN M. HART

James Higgins is remembered as an outstanding scholar of Latin American literature, Professor at the University of Liverpool (1988), and recipient of the Order of Simón Bolívar conferred by the National University of Trujillo in Peru (2014). He revolutionised the discipline of Latin American Studies in the United Kingdom and, in works such as *Visión del hombre y de la vida en las últimas obras poéticas de César Vallejo* (1970), *The Poet in Peru* (1982), and *César Vallejo en su poesía* (1989), he consolidated his reputation as the trailblazer of the analysis of Latin America's most important poet, César Vallejo (1892–1938).



James Higgs


I first met Professor James Higgins on a cold, rainy evening in Liverpool in the autumn of 1981, a year in from starting my PhD in Cambridge on the life and work of Latin America's 'greatest poet' (James's words rather than mine), the Peruvian César Vallejo (1892–1938). I had travelled up on the train from London to see him and I was daunted by the idea of meeting in the flesh the great Latin Americanist of Liverpool University, James Higgins. Ostensibly my aim was to get some advice on whom I should meet up with in my upcoming trip to Lima, but my real objective was just to meet him. He advised against seeing Vallejo's widow, Georgette de Vallejo who, though still alive at the time, would pass away soon afterwards (1984). He said Georgette would probably try to attack my reputation in the way she had tried to destroy his. I countered that I didn't really have a reputation to lose, but he brushed that off, and advised me to meet up instead with the Peruvian scholar, David Sobrevilla, of the Universidad de Lima. I remain grateful to this day for the advice James gave me at that time. I did eventually meet up with Professor David Sobrevilla in Lima, and it was an important step in my own journey along the path of Vallejo Studies.

James Higgins was born on 28 May 1939 in the small Scottish town of Bellshill in Lanarkshire, Scotland, actually – as it turns out – in the very year that the *editio princeps* of Vallejo's most significant collection of poems was published.¹ The eldest of five brothers, he was a hard-working student and the first of his family to go to university. He read Spanish and French at the University of Glasgow, and completed his teacher training at Jordanhill College of Education in Glasgow (1957–1961). This was when James met the love of his life, Kirstine Atwell. They were soon married and they began their life together in 1962 in Lyon, France, where James took up a post as English Assistant at a Lycée. James and Kirstine lived for two years in Lyon, a period of their life that, as Kirstine recalls, was full of fond memories. During their time there James was invited to interview for the post of Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Liverpool; the interview was successful and he was confirmed in his post by Professor Geoffrey Ribbans, the world-renowned expert on Galdós, Unamuno and Antonio Machado. James and Kirstine moved to Liverpool in 1964. They had two sons, Antony born in Glasgow, and who would one day follow in his father's footsteps and publish a book on Latin America, *Constructing the Criollo Archive* (2000),² just a year before his untimely death³ – and Graham, born in Birkenhead.

¹ *Poemas humanos (1923–1938)*, ed. Georgette de Vallejo & Raúl Porras Barrenechea (Paris: Les Éditions des Presses Modernes au Palais-Royal, 1939), 159 pp.

² Antony Higgins, *Constructing the Criollo Archive: Subjects of Knowledge in the 'Biblioteca Mexicana' and the 'Rustication Mexicana'* (Purdue University Press, 2000).

³ 'In Memoriam Antony Higgins, 1964–2001', *Calliope: Journal of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry*, 8.2 (2002), 95–97.

Not long after his arrival in Liverpool it became clear to his colleagues that James would before long become one of the pioneers of Latin American Studies in Britain. He developed a keen interest in Peruvian literature and in the work of César Vallejo in particular. James's first trip to Peru was on the Pacific Steam cargo ship which departed from Liverpool in January 1967; he was Passenger 13 on that ship,⁴ and it was a journey that would transform his life. The six months James spent in Peru were not uneventful. He wrote letters weekly to Kirstine during that period and, in March 1967, he told her about some political difficulties he had experienced. He had been invited to give a talk on Vallejo in the Porras Barrenchea Institute, and the first title he suggested – 'Vallejo's Religious Position' – was rejected. The second title he proposed – 'Vallejo and the Revolution' – was also rejected, as was the third – 'The Indian in Vallejo'. In the end he had to make do with a very innocuous title that could surely not cause offense: 'Vallejo's Concept of Man'.⁵ Despite these obstacles, James's time in Peru was enormously productive, and he was awarded a PhD for his thesis on 'César Vallejo's Vision of Man and Life in his Final Poetic Works' at the University of Liverpool in 1968.⁶

James's academic work – showcased in the articles he was publishing at that time – was starting to get him noticed. In the autumn term of 1968, he was invited by Professor Keith McDuffie at the University of Pittsburgh – the author of an excellent thesis on Vallejo that, bafflingly, he never published⁷ – to take up Pittsburgh's highly prestigious Andrew Mellon Visiting Professorship. James accepted and he began teaching classes on 19th-century Spanish-American literature and Spanish American Civilisation, working alongside Javier Herrero, the acclaimed *cervantista*, and Robin Carter, a graduate from St Andrews. A highly popular teacher, James was subsequently offered a permanent post as Associate Professor in Pittsburgh, but – though initially tempted – he decided against it.⁸

Two years later his first book came out, *Visión del hombre y de la vida en las últimas obras de César Vallejo* (1970), a highly influential work that revolutionised the field of Vallejo studies. It was the first book to provide meticulously close studies of the style and argument of each of Vallejo's poems. In this short summary I provide some indicators of the originality of Professor Higgins's research. For a more extensive record and summary of Professor Higgins's extensive publication portfolio the reader is referred to the bibliographical essay in the Festschrift volume devoted to James.⁹

⁴Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 20 September 2022.

⁵Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 20 September 2022.

⁶Stephen M. Hart, *César Vallejo: Research Bibliographies and Checklists: New Series* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2002), p. 159.

⁷Keith McDuffie, 'The Poetic Vision of César Vallejo in *Los heraldos negros* and *Trilce*' (University of Pittsburgh, 1969).

⁸Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 20 September 2022.

⁹'Bibliography of the Publications of James Higgins', *Studies of Latin American Literature in Honour of James Higgins*, edited by Stephen M. Hart and William Rowe (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 6–10.

Apart from being an excellent scholar not just of Peruvian but also of Latin American Literature, James also managed to act as primary supervisor to a number of PhD students, who have warm memories of his company and support. He became Head of the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Liverpool in January 1988, a post he held until January 1997, and he was a founding member of the Centre for Latin American Studies, later the Institute of Latin American Studies, with which he kept close ties throughout his career. Dr Valdi Astvaldsson, who worked alongside James for many years at the University of Liverpool, recalls that he ‘was very supportive, always available to have a chat or read drafts of academic work and provide constructive criticism: he would give his honest professional opinion, tell you what he thought was good and where improvements could be made, but he never made you feel as if he was the measure of everything’; he was ‘calm, considered, kind and hospitable, a true gentleman with a fine sense of humour’.¹⁰ Núria Triana-Toribio, of the University of Kent, for her part, remembers James as a ‘wonderful mentor whose door was never closed’. Though ‘a highly influential Latin Americanist (...), he was interested in everything I wanted to discuss with him, Spanish cinema, music, popular culture’.¹¹ James was especially supportive of his junior colleagues during this period. When Dr Adam Sharman (University of Nottingham) organised a conference on Vallejo, he recalls that James ‘was extremely generous with his time (...) He contributed, really, as a favour to a young scholar just starting out. He didn’t need to attend the colloquium or to publish in that volume, but he did both. Modest and self-effacing.’¹²

Another of James’s colleagues, Mike Thacker, recalls how James worked on the recruitment strategy of the Liverpool department in the 1980s, which proved to be highly successful. He was ‘greatly respected by his students, many of whom had been attracted to Liverpool by the strong Latin-American section of the course, which Jim had devised’. Perhaps most importantly, ‘Jim was a leader: shrewd and clear-minded, he earned the respect of his colleagues by his manner of running the department (...). A highly competent administrator, he knew how to delegate, and find ways round bureaucratic obstacles. He understood the strengths of his colleagues, valued their contributions to the department, had little time for red tape and made decisions rapidly and without fuss’.¹³ But James also had a less conventional side to his character. Roger Wright remembers that James’s university office in Liverpool often smelt of cigarettes, even after the time when smoking was strictly forbidden, but there was a reason for this! As Roger recalls: ‘put a

¹⁰ Valdi Astvaldsson, ‘Obituary: Professor James Higgins’, 14 October 2021; <https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2021/10/14/obituary-professor-james-higgins/> (consulted on 1 August 2022).

¹¹ Email to author, 11 April 2022.

¹² Email to author, 7 April 2022.

¹³ Email to author, 13 April 2022.

cigarette in his mouth and sit him in front of a complex piece of Spanish American poetry and he'd explain it in minutes'.¹⁴

This was, indeed, the genius of James Higgins's literary criticism. Books such as his highly influential *César Vallejo: An Anthology of His Poetry* (1970) show you how Vallejo's poetry works and tease out the literary, cultural and historical ramifications effortlessly before your eyes. Published in the Pergamon Oxford Latin American Series, this book was a model of its kind.¹⁵ Including a brief biography of the Peruvian poet, followed by a discussion of the literary environment in which he moved, the introduction is distinctive in terms of the way in which it analyses each of the poems chosen thoroughly, drawing out the poem's argument and analysing – with great concision and insight – the peculiarity of Vallejo's poetic idiom. This structure allowed James to directly engage with its specified audience – the first-year Latin American Studies undergraduate:

The modern poem differs from the traditional poem in that, whereas the latter is logical and coherent on both levels, the logic and coherence of the former is that of the poetic emotion and there is no concern that its external representation should be logical and coherent. Hence the relationship between the two levels is not always logically apparent. Often there is no direct reference to the stimulus of the poetic emotion and instead it is reduced to an image that symbolizes its emotional import. Nor is the emotion explained but is conveyed to us by the imagery.¹⁶

The notes – especially in their careful differentiation in Vallejo's use of archaisms, Peruvianisms, colloquialisms, Gallicisms, technical terms and neologisms, and the inspired translation of particularly difficult passages – are insightful. One of my favourites is his explanation of a particularly obscure word in line 16 of *Trilce* LXXI which describes the to-ing and fro-ing of two lovers: '*ennavajados*, armed with razors. This is a technical term employed in cock-fighting. Cocks often have razors attached to their spurs to increase their effectiveness. Here it can be taken as having the sense of doubly armed.'¹⁷ James was not a great fan of some of the postmodern and postcolonial theories that swept throughout the academy in the 1980s and 1990s. Philip Swanson, the Hughes Professor of Spanish at the University of Sheffield, in his own memoir, articulates James's no-nonsense approach to teaching and knowledge: 'As a teacher, I found Jim inspirational as I did him as a scholar. What really struck me about him was his remarkable economy of expression. He taught and wrote with great economy and precision – he

¹⁴ Email to author, 8 April 2022.

¹⁵ 'Introduction', in *César Vallejo: An Anthology of his Poetry*, with an Introduction and Notes by James Higgins (Oxford: Pergamon, 1970), pp. 1–84.

¹⁶ 'Introduction', in *César Vallejo: An Anthology of his Poetry*, p. 35.

¹⁷ 'Notes', in *César Vallejo: An Anthology of his Poetry*, p. 176.

didn't go in for generic commentary or waffle but was able to zone in on the key issue with great precision.¹⁸

In subsequent conversations with James after our first meeting in 1981 he told me that – in the academy as much as beyond – everyone seemed to accept that Vallejo was a great poet, but many critics restricted their attention to just a few of the famous poems. James completely revolutionised the field when he began systematically interpreting all of Vallejo's poems, an approach typified by his essay, 'Vallejo en cada poema'.¹⁹ For James the aim of literary criticism was to bring to life the meaning of the poem via a detailed *explication de texte*. Some of the essays he published during this period – such as his study of 'Los nueve monstruos'²⁰, 'Va corriendo, andando...'²¹, 'Y si después de tantas palabras...'²², 'Un pilar soportando consuelos...'²³ and 'El alma que sufrió de ser su cuerpo...'²⁴ – are intense and beautifully written close readings of Vallejo's most difficult poems from *Poemas humanos*. James also studied leitmotifs such as the 'conflict of personality',²⁵ the role played by evil,²⁶ disillusionment,²⁷ pain,²⁸ and (my favourite article of his!) absurdity²⁹ in Vallejo's oeuvre. His work was particularly insightful about religion; in his essay, 'La posición religiosa de César Vallejo a través de su poesía',³⁰ for example, James showed how charity and brotherly love were invoked at different stages of Vallejo's writing and, during the Spanish Civil War, essentially re-politicised. Philip Swanson brings out James's skill in this regard pointedly: 'He had, of course, an encyclopaedic knowledge (of Peruvian literature in particular), but he was also a fantastic close reader – I thought he was a brilliant traditional interpreter of literary texts. He once said to me: "There are two types of intellectual – those who make simple things sound complicated and those who make complicated things sound simple." Jim was definitely the latter, and the way he made Vallejo accessible to generations of students was a perfect

¹⁸ Email to author 2 August 2022.

¹⁹ 'Vallejo en cada poema', *Mundo Nuevo* (Paris), 22 (1968), 21–26.

²⁰ "'Los nueve monstruos' de César Vallejo: una tentativa de interpretación', *Razón y Fábula* (La Paz), 2 (1967), 20–25.

²¹ "'Va corriendo, andando...'", *Cuadernos del Idioma*, 10 (1968), 119–23

²² "'Y si después de tantas palabras'", in *Aproximaciones a César Vallejo*, ed. Angel Flores, 2 vols (New York: Las Américas, 1971), II, pp. 263–66.

²³ "'Un pilar soportando consuelos...'", in *Aproximaciones a César Vallejo*, II, 297–300.

²⁴ "'El alma que sufrió de ser su cuerpo...'", in *Aproximaciones a César Vallejo*, II, 313–21.

²⁵ 'The Conflict of Personality in César Vallejo's *Poemas humanos*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, XLIII:1 (1966), 47–55.

²⁶ 'El tema del mal en los *Poemas humanos* de César Vallejo', *Letras* (Lima), 78–79 (1967), 92–108.

²⁷ 'El pensamiento y el desengaño en César Vallejo', *San Marcos*, 7 (1967–68), 77–89.

²⁸ 'El dolor en los *Poemas humanos* de César Vallejo', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 222 (1968), 619–31.

²⁹ 'El absurdo en la poesía de César Vallejo', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 71 (1970), 217–41.

³⁰ 'La posición religiosa de César Vallejo a través de su poesía', *Caravelle* (Toulouse), 9 (1967), 47–58.

example of that.³¹ For my own part I have always seen James's gargantuan outpouring of criticism on Vallejo from 1966 until 1974 as echoing the extraordinary productivity of Vallejo himself from 3 September until 8 December 1937 when he had just returned to Paris from the battlefields of Spain during the Spanish Civil War, and he began writing the poems that would come together after his premature death as *Poemas humanos* and *Espana, aparta de mi este caliz*.

In 1974 James began a stint as Visiting Professor at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, in the Department of Classics and Modern Languages. While there he met Professor Jim McDonald, then Acting Head at Queen's University, Kingston, who invited James to give a talk on the work of Vallejo's great rival, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. As he told Kirstine: 'Little do they know that I have never given a class on Neruda and until now never read more than a handful of his poems'. Despite this he 'managed to knock up a reasonable lecture' and, as he remarked to Kirstine later on: 'You can talk about anything if you put your mind to it.'³² This was typical of James's modesty.

It was in his three authoritative works, *Visión del hombre y de la vida en las últimas obras poéticas de César Vallejo* (1970), *The Poet in Peru: Alienation and the Quest for a Super-reality* (1982), and *César Vallejo en su poesía* (1989), that James refined his vision of Vallejo's work in its poetic and historical context. In order to refine the reader's understanding of that context, James chose, for example in *The Poet in Peru*, to portray Vallejo as the North Star within Peru's poetic firmament. In this work he studies Vallejo's work alongside that of five other poets – José María Eguren (1874–1942), Carlos Germán Belli (b. 1927), Antonio Cisneros (1942–2012), César Moro (1903–1956), and Martín Adán (1908–1985) – and he starts from the hypothesis that alienation is the most characteristic trait of 20th-century Peruvian poetry as well as 'all contemporary Western literature'.³³ Though the Peruvian poets share this trait with other western writers, alienation has a special resonance for them since they

are outsiders who feel themselves out of place in the country and in the world where it has been their lot to live. Yet if theirs has been a painful experience in personal terms, it has been fruitful for poetry. For not only has their disconformity with their world impelled them to write and furnished them with poetic material, but the best of them have embraced their estrangement and have used their isolation to develop a style of their own.³⁴

³¹ Email to author 2 August 2022.

³² Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 16 September 2022.

³³ *The Poet in Peru: Alienation and the Quest for a Super-Reality* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1982), p. 1.

³⁴ *The Poet in Peru*, p. 1.

Vallejo's poetry provides the template for this work. His alienation is traced back to his personal experience of homesickness as a 'lonely *serrano* immigrant' in Lima,³⁵ as well as to his self-distancing from capitalism during the Depression in the 1930s,³⁶ and this provides a measuring-stick, as it were, for the analysis of this leitmotif in Carlos Germán Belli's work. As James suggests, Belli develops this theme mainly in terms of a rejection of the crassness of Lima's elite in a 'personal style which combines elements derived from Spanish poetry of the Golden Age – a classical or archaic vocabulary; a disconcerting syntax characterised by hyperbaton and ellipsis; the frequent use of reiterative epithet; a predilection for the hendecasyllable and the heptasyllable – with contemporary themes and modern and colloquial language and imagery'.³⁷ The theme of alienation is seen to veer in a different direction in Antonio Cisneros's poetry via a 'scepticism with regard to utopian idealisations of the pre-Colombian civilisations' of Peru, particularly the Incas.³⁸

Balancing this prevailing mood of alienation, however, in the Peruvian poetic tradition is another wave of artistic energy, a 'visionary or neo-mystical poetics in which poetry is conceived as an alternative life style devoted to the passionate pursuit of self-fulfilment'; the visionary poet seeks to 'capture the privileged moment which Pater calls "beatific vision" and Joyce "epiphany", the moment when he is fulfilled by an ecstatic sense of participating in a cosmic harmony'.³⁹ James finds some evidence of this visionary poetics even in gloomy Vallejo's work, especially in the poems of the 1922 collection, *Trilce*, where there are hints of a 'transcendental state' achieved through art (as in the Venus de Milo statue addressed in Tr. XXXVI), via sex with the beloved, in the unexplained apprehension of life's hidden harmony, and in the ecstatic vision of nature's beauty.⁴⁰ Yet it is a foundational structure in the work of poets such as José María Eguren, César Moro and Martín Adán. In Eguren's poetry, for example, this visionary poetics emerges through the veil of French Symbolism with its emphasis on the evocation of an ideal world hidden beneath the objects of the material world, and the messenger of that other world is the poet's alter ego, a figure called 'Peregrine': 'Peregrín cazador de figuras, / con ojos de diamante / mira desde las ciegas alturas'.⁴¹ César Moro, for his part, rejected his native city (Lima, which he famously called 'Lima la horrible', an epithet that stuck) as well as his native language (he only published one collection of poems in Spanish, preferring to publish his poetry in French), and his visionary poetics was

³⁵ *The Poet in Peru*, p. 25.

³⁶ *The Poet in Peru*, pp. 39–45.

³⁷ *The Poet in Peru*, p. 46.

³⁸ *The Poet in Peru*, p. 70.

³⁹ *The Poet in Peru*, p. 91.

⁴⁰ *The Poet in Peru*, pp. 116–122.

⁴¹ *The Poet in Peru*, p. 93.

expressed via his complete immersion in Surrealism. As James notes, Moro joined hands with the Surrealists in seeing the ‘artist as a revolutionary waging a campaign of subversion aimed at overthrowing a hated civilisation and liberating the human species’, no less!⁴² In the last chapter of this work, James focuses on Martín Adán whose work differs from that of Eguren and Moro in that he was more of a traditionalist; despite dabbling in some avant-garde techniques early in his life, he devoted the majority of his work to an exploration of the sonnet form, although he did share with these two poets a desire to re-create a super-reality via a ‘poetic ecstasy’ centred on the allegorical motif of the Rose.⁴³ *The Poet in Peru* is an excellent compendium of knowledge about the modern poetic tradition in Peru, as guided by the pendulum that swings between alienation on the one hand and a visionary poetics on the other.

A linguist to the core, James was also keen to bring the beauty of Vallejo’s poetry to the English-speaking world. His own translation of Vallejo’s poetry came out in 1987, and it was complete with a fine introduction along with detailed notes.⁴⁴ The distinctive trait of these translations is their linguistic accuracy, the almost physical way in which they cleave to Vallejo’s original verse. The original Spanish of one of Vallejo’s most famous poems ‘Los heraldos negros’ runs as follows:

Hay golpes en la vida, tan fuertes ... Yo no sé!
Golpes como del odio de Dios; como si antes ellos,
la resaca de todo lo sufrido
se empozara en el alma... Yo no sé!

James’s translation might be too literal for some poetry connoisseurs:

There are blows in life, so hard... I don’t know!
Blows as if from the hatred of God; as if in the face of them
The backwash of everything we’ve suffered
Had welled up in the soul... I don’t know!⁴⁵

Other translators have embellished Vallejo’s poetry by translating the refrain ‘Yo no sé’ poetically, but what James manages to conserve in his translation is the colloquial roughness of the Peruvian poet’s diction. Vallejo refuses to mince his words. He may be talking via the persona of the Romantic poet for whom the world is a hostile place but Vallejo simply records that some things that happen in life are so bad that it seems like God hates you. And Vallejo just calls them physical ‘blows’. James chooses his words carefully. Thus he is able to retain the liquid metaphors with both of the verbs used in

⁴² *The Poet in Peru*, p. 123.

⁴³ *The Poet in Peru*, pp. 153–60.

⁴⁴ *César Vallejo: A Selection of his Poetry*, with translations, introductions and notes by James Higgins (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987).

⁴⁵ *César Vallejo: A Selection of his Poetry*, p. 3.

line 3 and 4 – ‘resaca’ and ‘empozarse’ – by translating these words as ‘backwash’ and ‘welled up’. By using these particular words James is able to retain the earthiness and physical disgust experienced by the poet as a result of misfortune. For Vallejo this was not an abstract emotion but something physical and visceral. Vallejo had just heard that his sister had been raped before he wrote the poem, and James’s translation manages to capture the feelings of disgust effectively. James’s focus upon linguistic accuracy meant that his translations were not vulnerable to the type of critique that other translators such as Clayton Eshleman have been subjected to. Eshleman’s *César Vallejo: The Complete Poetry, a Bilingual Edition*,⁴⁶ was savaged by the Yale critic, Roberto González Echevarría, with the following words: ‘English-language readers of Vallejo will have to make do with what this book offers them, which is quite a lot but, alas, not quite Vallejo.’⁴⁷

James’s translations of Vallejo will, indeed, survive the test of time. His English rendition of Vallejo’s most famous poem, ‘Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca’:

Me moriré en París con aguacero,
 un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo.
 Me moriré en París – y yo no me corro –
 talvez un jueves, como es hoy, de otoño.
 Jueves será, porque hoy, jueves, que proso
 estos versos, los húmeros me he puesto
 a la mala y, jamás como hoy, me he vuelto,
 con todo mi camino, a verme solo.
 César Vallejo ha muerto, le pegaban
 todos sin que él les haga nada ;
 le daban duro con un palo y duro
 también con una soga ; son testigos
 los días jueves y los huesos húmeros,
 la soledad, la lluvia., los caminos...⁴⁸

is as clipped and stark as the original Spanish:

I’ll die in Paris when it’s raining hard
 on a day that’s already lodged in my memory.
 I’ll die in Paris – and I’m not running away –
 maybe some Thursday, like today, in Autumn.

⁴⁶ *César Vallejo: The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition*, edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman (Berkeley CA: California University Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ Roberto González Echevarría, ‘Revolutionary Devotion’, *The Nation* (21 May 2007), 25–30 (p. 30).

⁴⁸ César Vallejo, *Poemas humanos (1923–1938)* (Paris: Les Éditions des Presses Modernes au Palais Royal, 1939); facsimilar edition, edited by César Ferreira (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma, 2019), p. 54.

Thursday it'll be, for today, Thursday, when I prose
 these verses, I've donned my humeri
 with reluctance and never as today,
 for all my long road, have I ever seen myself so alone.

César Vallejo is dead, they all beat him
 when he'd done nothing to them;
 they hit him hard with a stick and hard
 too with a rope; witnesses are
 the Thursdays and the humerus bones,
 the loneliness, the rain, the roads...⁴⁹

This translation is deceptively simple. Its almost hidden artistry is epitomised by the slightly awkward phrase 'with reluctance' in l. 7, though this is an inspired rendition of 'a la mala', a Peruvianism intentionally positioned by Vallejo in the middle of the poem, which is the equivalent of 'de mala gana' in standard Castilian (reluctantly). Vallejo, as anyone who reads his poetry will know, often referred to his Peruvian identity in a mock-ironic tone, as occurs most memorably in 'Ello es que...':

guardar un día para cuando no haya,
 una noche también, para cuando haya
 (así se dice en el Perú – me excuso)
 to save a day for when there isn't one,
 a night too for when there is
 (sorry – it's what they say in Peru).⁵⁰

As this passage exemplifies, James's knowledge of Vallejo and Peruvian poetry relied as much on his in-depth knowledge of local idiolects in Peru as anything else.

In many ways it was his study, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, originally published in 1989 and re-issued in 2015, that we find the definitive version of James Higgins's understanding of Vallejo's poetic vision.⁵¹ The prologue to the 1989 edition of the work epitomises James's methodology:

Este libro obedece a una convicción que ha inspirado todos mis trabajos sobre Vallejo: el mayor homenaje que podemos rendir al poeta es procurar adentrarnos en su mundo poético. El Vallejo auténtico se encuentra, no en las biografías ni en los libros de tipo general que se valen del escritor para desarrollar teorías personales, sino en los poemas mismos. En las últimas décadas los estudios vallejianos han avanzado mucho, pero aún no hemos hecho más que tocar la superficie de la obra más genial de la poesía de lengua española de este siglo.⁵²

⁴⁹ *César Vallejo: A Selection of his Poetry*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ *César Vallejo: A Selection of his Poetry*, pp. 102-03.

⁵¹ James Higgins, *César Vallejo en su poesía* (Lima: Editorial Cátedra Vallejo, 2015).

⁵² 'Prólogo 1989', *César Vallejo en su poesía*, p. 14.

This statement is significant for two reasons, first, for its emphasis on the importance of reading the poems themselves, i.e., creating a close reading of Vallejo's work, as well as its expression of James's conviction that Vallejo's poetry was the most significant of the 20th century in the Spanish-speaking world. James's analysis covers the full gamut of the central themes of Vallejo's work, including provincialism,⁵³ existential crisis,⁵⁴ visceral insecurity,⁵⁵ urban alienation,⁵⁶ the tyranny of biological laws,⁵⁷ paradise lost,⁵⁸ the poetic search for a super-reality,⁵⁹ Vallejo's European experience,⁶⁰ the absurdity of life,⁶¹ and the crisis of capitalism sparked by the Wall Street Crash that occurred in October 1929.⁶² The extent and depth of Vallejo's expression of a socialist ideology is carefully extracted from four poems, 'Considerando en frío...', 'Hasta el día en que vuelva...', 'Los desgraciados' from *Poemas humanos*, and 'Masa' from *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*.⁶³ Finally, James picks on three poems ('Salutación angélica', 'El alma que sufrió de ser su cuerpo...' and 'Un pilar soportando consuelos...') to point to the fundamental ambivalence of Vallejo's political positionality in his final collection of poems,⁶⁴ and two poems in the final chapter ('Despedida recordando un adiós', from *Poemas humanos* and 'España, aparta de mí este cáliz', the signature poem of Vallejo's Spanish Civil War poems), are explored in terms of Vallejo's vacillation between faith and disillusionment.⁶⁵ Chapters 10–13 are arguably the most valuable of this fine collection of essays, not least because they draw out in a lucid and compelling way the causal and necessary connections between linguistic and political ambivalence in Vallejo's work. As a result of Theodor Adorno's famous assertion that 'there can be no poetry after Auschwitz' – aided by poets such as Pablo Neruda and Louis Aragon – the idea has emerged that there is necessarily a juncture when a poet needs to sacrifice artistic complexity on the altar of political commitment. Vallejo's work, however, breaks the Gordian knot linking poetic commitment to rhetorical simplicity, and James Higgins was the first critic to draw this observation out into the open arena of Latin American Studies, seeing it as a sign of intellectual vigour rather than a symptom of political confusion, as had often been the case until then.

⁵³ Chapter 1, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 15–19.

⁵⁴ Chapter 2, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 21–36.

⁵⁵ Chapter 3, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 37–44.

⁵⁶ Chapter 4, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 45–60.

⁵⁷ Chapter 5, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 61–74.

⁵⁸ Chapter 6, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 75–88.

⁵⁹ Chapter 7, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 89–110.

⁶⁰ Chapter 8, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 111–124.

⁶¹ Chapter 9, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 125–144.

⁶² Chapter 10, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 145–160.

⁶³ Chapter 11, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 161–180.

⁶⁴ Chapter 12, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 181–198.

⁶⁵ Chapter 13, *César Vallejo en su poesía*, pp. 199–208.

In 1990 James was invited to spend a semester as Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. The teaching regime there, like the weather, was unforgiving. As Kirstine, who accompanied him on this trip, recalls: ‘I remember being surprised that everything seemed to stop at 9 pm and it became clear that the 8 am tutorials were the reason for this. We had an apartment in a building on the edge of a frozen lake and the walk to the university was a challenge in the biting wind.’⁶⁶ James’s stints as Visiting Professor in a number of different universities – he had even spent time as Visiting Professor at the University of Trinidad and Tobago at Port of Spain in 1978 – had served to broaden his interests beyond the study of the poetry of Peru’s and arguably Latin America’s best poet. We should be wary, therefore, of making the same mistake that Vallejo’s widow, Georgette, did when she casually asked James in a conversation with him in Lima sometime in the 1960s why on earth he had decided to focus all of his intellectual energies on her late husband’s work. Clearly she was unaware of James’s other interests. As noted above, he wrote on other Peruvian poets such as Carlos Germán Belli,⁶⁷ José María Eguren,⁶⁸ Martín Adán,⁶⁹ César Moro,⁷⁰ and Antonio Cisneros,⁷¹ but these were not the only Peruvian poets he chose to focus on. He also wrote on Blanca Varela,⁷² Sebastián Salazar Bondy⁷³, as well as novelists and short story writers such as Enrique Congrains Martín,⁷⁴ Miguel Gutiérrez,⁷⁵ Julio Ramón Ribeyro,⁷⁶ the great José María Arguedas,⁷⁷ the inimitable Bryce Echenique,⁷⁸ and the Nobel Laureate Mario

⁶⁶ Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 16 September 2022.

⁶⁷ ‘El mundo poético de Carlos Germán Belli a través del poema “Contra el estío”’, in *Literatura de la emancipación hispanoamericana y otros ensayos* (Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1972), pp. 179–83; ‘Carlos Germán Belli: una introducción a sus poesías’, *Textual* (Lima), 4 (1972), 59–63.

⁶⁸ ‘Eguren: alienado y visionario’, *Tierradentro* (Lima), 3 (1985), 59–88.

⁶⁹ ‘La aventura poética de Martín Adán en *Travesía de extramares*’, in *Homenaje a Luis Alberto Sánchez*, ed. R. Mead (Madrid: Insula, 1983), pp. 219–317.

⁷⁰ ‘Westphalen, Moro y la poesía surrealista’, *Cielo Abierto*, 29 (1984), 16–26.

⁷¹ ‘Antonio Cisneros: la ironía desmitificadora’, in *Metáfora de la experiencia: la poesía de Antonio Cisneros*, ed. M.A. Zapata (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1998), pp. 211–43.

⁷² ‘Blanca Varela’, in *Contemporary World Writers*, ed. T. Chevalier (Andover: St. James Press, 1993), 539–40.

⁷³ ‘Sebastián Salazar Bondy’, in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, ed. Verity Smith (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), p. 748.

⁷⁴ ‘A Forgotten Peruvian Novelist: Enrique Congrains Martín’, *Iberoromania*, 2 (1971), 112–20.

⁷⁵ ‘Replanteando las relaciones de raza y de género en el Perú: *La violencia del tiempo* de Miguel Gutiérrez’, *Neue Romania*, 16 (1995), 247–56.

⁷⁶ ‘Family History and Social Change in Two Short Stories of Julio Ramon Ribeyro’, in *New Frontiers in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Scholarship*, ed. T.J. Dadson, et. al. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), pp. 517–29.

⁷⁷ ‘El tema de la *Yawar Fiesta* en la narrativa peruana del 50’, in *Homenaje a don Luis Monguió*, ed. J. Aladro-Font (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 1997), pp. 233–46.

⁷⁸ ‘*Un mundo para Julius*: The Swan-song of the Peruvian Oligarchy’, *Tesserae*, IV.1 (1998), 35–45.

Vargas Llosa.⁷⁹ As this list suggests James did not write on writers because they were famous or because they might help him climb the promotion-ladder of academia. He read works for what they were, and he was always ready to voice his considered opinion on them.

An example of James's interest in writers who might be considered off the beaten track is his 1994 study, *Myths of the Emergent: Social Mobility in Contemporary Peruvian Fiction*.⁸⁰ In this monograph James demonstrated that his real interest lay not in the set of middle-class writers for whom the lower social sectors 'play a passive role as the raw material' for their fiction, but in the writers from the lower échelons of society who have sought to 'produce fiction reflecting the experience and perspective of the underclasses'.⁸¹ As James went on to suggest:

[W]hile established middle-class figures like Julio Ramón Ribeyro, Mario Vargas Llosa and Alfredo Bryce Echenique remain the big names in terms of prestige, Peruvian fiction is becoming more representative of the nation as a whole as more plebeian authors, such as Miguel Gutiérrez, Gregorio Martínez, Cronwell Jara and Augusto Higa, begin to make their presence felt on the literary scene.⁸²

He studies two novels in this monograph – Miguel Gutiérrez's *La violencia del tiempo* (1991) and Cronwell Jara's *Patíbulo para un caballo* (1989) – and shows how the legitimacy of the Spanish Conquest in Peru is deconstructed in these novels, and thus the marginalised classes are demonstrated to be 'the best in Peruvian society'.⁸³ In point of fact they are the only class able to 'achieve the ideal of an egalitarian, multiracial Peru',⁸⁴ and again we see James's interest in allowing new voices to emerge in Peru's literary establishment which are, to re-quote his words, 'more representative of the nation as a whole'.⁸⁵

Indeed, James was not afraid to ruffle the feathers of the establishment when he saw fit to do so. I remember the occasion when he was invited as part of a delegation to visit the recently inaugurated Cervantes Institute in Stockholm to discuss Vargas Llosa's work. The event occurred on 24 September 2011, and it was clear that the stakes were high since we were informed that some members of the Nobel Prize committee would be in attendance. When the issue of Vargas Llosa's ability to express the wider gamut of

⁷⁹ 'Un mundo dividido: imágenes del Perú en la novelística de Mario Vargas Llosa', in *Mario Vargas Llosa, escritor, ensayista, ciudadano y político*, ed. R. Forgues (Lima: Minerva, 2001), pp. 267–76.

⁸⁰ James Higgins, *Myths of the Emergent: Social Mobility in Contemporary Peruvian Fiction*, ILAS, Monograph Series, No. 19 (Liverpool: Institute of Latin American Studies, The University of Liverpool, 1994).

⁸¹ *Myths of the Emergent*, p. 13.

⁸² *Myths of the Emergent*, pp. 13–14.

⁸³ *Myths of the Emergent*, p. 90.

⁸⁴ *Myths of the Emergent*, p. 154.

⁸⁵ *Myths of the Emergent*, p. 13.

cultures and races epitomised by the Peruvian nation came up, James stood up and, in a very forthright way, argued that Vargas Llosa was a ‘criollo’ who – as his novel *La casa verde* (1966) proved – had little interest in or knowledge of the Indian races and their heritage and that it was wrong to use this perspective to look at his work. I had noticed that, just before James stood up, Mario had slipped into the room and I tried to alert James to this fact by a series of nudges, winks and whispers, but it was all in vain. James got into full throttle in his fulsome critique of Vargas Llosa’s ideological credentials as articulated by his novels. Vargas Llosa took up the thread of the argument immediately after James finished his tirade, and this led to a lively debate which was keenly enjoyed by the audience – including myself! James told me afterwards that he was grateful for my nudges in his ribs, but he was fully aware of the fact that Mario had entered the room, and that’s why he had decided to express his opinion in such a forthright manner!

It should also be said that James occasionally ventured outside the Peruvian ambit with articles on the likes of the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez⁸⁶ and the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges.⁸⁷ He showed an interest too in popular culture, as evidenced by works on the popular Latin American song, and ‘local’ Latin American history, as demonstrated by his superb and very readable cultural history of Lima, published in 2005.⁸⁸

James’s academic career has been stellar – he became Professor of Latin American Literature in January 1988, was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1999 and, on his retirement, in 2004, he became Emeritus Professor of Latin American Literature at the University of Liverpool. He was also the General Editor of the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and he led the ship through stormy waters with verve and a firm rudder. But James had a fun side too, as the following remembrance by Valdi Astvalsson suggests:

In 1998, the University of Iceland contacted me to ask if I could form a panel to evaluate the work of two applicants for a lectureship in Hispanic Studies. I asked James if he could help and he immediately agreed. The job included a weekend trip to Iceland, one meeting and a couple of days of sightseeing. I was impressed by James’ genuine interest in everything he saw and absorbed with enthusiasm, such as the old centre of Reykjavik, its old harbour, the places we visited on a day trip to the lava fields where the old Althing had been established in the year 1000, the Gullfoss waterfall, the geysers and the greenhouses where soft fruit and even bananas are grown. In Reykjavik we also met some members of my family and friends and enjoyed meals and conversation that sometimes

⁸⁶ ‘Cien años de soledad, historia del hombre occidental’, *Cuadernos del Sur*, 11 (1972), 303–14.

⁸⁷ ‘On His Blindness: Jorge Luis Borges’ “Poema de los dones”, in *Readings in Spanish and Portuguese Poetry for Geoffrey Connell*, ed. N.G. Round and D.G. Walters (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Department of Hispanic Studies, 1985), pp. 98–105.

⁸⁸ James Higgins, *Lima: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

went on long into the night. It was clear that all this delighted James and, later, he would often remember this experience with a great smile on his face.⁸⁹

Shortly after retiring in 2004, James and Kirstine moved to Scotland, where they settled down in a beautiful flat they had bought in an old mansion in the centre of Stirling. As Kirstine recalls:

James became a member of the Stirling and Falkirk Ramblers. He took delight in discovering walks in the environs of Stirling and beyond. He became a walk leader, keen to share his ‘discovered’ walks with others. He was not a driver and used his bus pass to explore his native Scotland seeking out new places of interest. He became a master of the bus timetables.⁹⁰

Though he began reading for ‘pleasure’ during his retirement, ‘mainly espionage and light detective stories often with a “medicinal” whisky nearby’, as Kirstine remembers,⁹¹ James continued his research on Peruvian literature and, in 2006, he brought out a re-vamped and much extended new version of his acclaimed history of Peruvian literature published originally in 1987.⁹² The second edition was in Spanish and – though in the introduction to the volume James suggests that it is not exhaustive – by any reputable academic standard, it *is* exhaustive.⁹³ It has an excellent chapter on Quechuan literature and cultural production (pp. 15–58), a thoughtful and erudite chapter on the Peruvian chronicles (pp. 61–81), and a highly informative chapter on theatre from the colonial times until the present day (pp. 85–105). He makes the bold decision to call poetry published between 1821 and 1919 ‘poetry of the republic’ (pp. 109–128), thereby junking all the intermediary epithets of Romantic, Modernist, Nationalist, etc., and he does the same with all the epithets such as Realist, Naturalist, *costumbrista* associated with the prose and the novel genre of the same period, which simply become part of the ‘prose of the republic’ (pp. 131–155). In both cases, James’s approach means that he cuts through all the ‘red tape’ of genre dancing that critics of this period normally indulge in, and he simply analyses each of the significant works – it’s a successful formula, and its combination of simplicity and brass tacks sums up the resilience of his approach.

A work of this scope also draws attention to one of the hallmarks of James’s work. Similar in this to some extent to the work of Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, James’s writing is able to tease out the social groups and ideological forces that are at work in the literary works he analyses, and pick on specific events in, say, the novels where the clash of social ideologies or the groups that represent or embody these

⁸⁹ Valdi Astvaldsson, ‘Obituary: Professor James Higgins’, 14 October 2021.

⁹⁰ Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 20 September 2022.

⁹¹ Kirstine Higgins; email to author, 20 September 2022.

⁹² James Higgins, *A History of Peruvian Literature* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987).

⁹³ James Higgins, *Historia de la literatura peruana* (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma, 2006).

ideologies comes to the fore. It also has the advantage of providing a neat chronological – even developmentalist – structure to the narrative. The book also points to one other feature of James’s work: his interest – predominantly – in poetry above all the other genres. Chapter 7 of this work is on Peruvian avant-garde poetry (pp. 159–191), and it is erudite, exhaustive and highly balanced in its assessment. The pages devoted to Vallejo, as one might expect, are particularly powerful (pp. 167–182) and, as a result of being squeezed in with the other poets, Vallejo seems more ‘Peruvian’ than normal. Of particular interest in this volume are the two completely new chapters dedicated to ‘new narrative’ (pp. 269–321) in which a new generation of novelists including the likes of Enrique Congrains Martín, Oswaldo Reynoso, Eleodoro Vargas Vicuña, Carlos Eduardo Zavaleta (who was Peruvian Ambassador in the United Kingdom in the 1980s) and Julio Ramón Ribeyro are promoted. The chapter on new poetic voices – including the discussion of works by Javier Heraud (1942–1963), Luis Hernández (1941–1977), Antonio Cisneros (1942–2012), Rodolfo Hinostroza (1941–2016), Marco Martos (b. 1942), José Watanabe (1946–2007), Abelardo Sánchez León (b. 1947), Carmen Ollé (b. 1947), Enrique Verástegui (1950–2018), Giovanna Pollarolo (b. 1952), Eduardo Chirinos (1960–2016),⁹⁴ and José Antonio Mazzotti (b. 1961), is authoritative and canonic (pp. 325–357).

But while James continued his research on Peruvian literature, a new literary love of his life developed during this period. Now that he found himself once more in Scotland, James started dedicating his life in retirement to reading Scottish history and literature: one thing he accomplished was to produce and publish a free translation in verse of John Barbour’s *The Bruce*.⁹⁵ He dedicated this verse translation to his beloved wife, Kirstine.

I managed to prise James out of his retirement on two occasions. The first occurred when I invited him to take part in a debate about the translation of Vallejo’s poetry with Clayton Eshleman at the Cervantes Institute in London on 24 April 2006. To set the scene, it should be recalled that James had published his own translations of Vallejo’s poems in 1987, as mentioned above,⁹⁶ while Clayton had brought out his ‘official’ translation of the posthumous poems in 1978,⁹⁷ which was followed 29 years later by his translation of Vallejo’s complete poetic works.⁹⁸ The question addressed by the colloquium was: is it possible to translate Vallejo’s poetry with perfect accuracy into English,

⁹⁴ Stephen Hart, Review, Eduardo Chirinos, *Abrir en prosa: ensayos sobre poesía hispanoamericana*, BSS, XCIV (2017), 559–60.

⁹⁵ James Higgins, *John Barbour’s ‘The Bruce’: A New Translation in Verse* (Bury St Edmunds: Arima Publishing, 2013).

⁹⁶ *César Vallejo: A Selection of his Poetry*, with translations, introduction and notes by James Higgins (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987).

⁹⁷ *César Vallejo: The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, translated by Clayton Eshleman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

⁹⁸ *The Complete Poetry: César Vallejo: A Bilingual Edition*, edited by and translated by Clayton Eshleman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

and Clayton said ‘yes’ and James said ‘no’. Fireworks ensued. It was, as you might imagine, a thoroughly entertaining event!

The second occasion occurred when I managed to persuade James to attend the inaugural meeting of the Congreso Internacional Vallejo Siempre which was held in Lima, Trujillo and Santiago de Chuco – the latter is Vallejo’s birthplace – on 23–26 October 2014. He gave a paper in this event, ‘A Panoramic Vision of Cesar Vallejo’s Poetry’, which was warmly received by Peru’s intelligentsia.⁹⁹ James said he was amazed by how many people wanted to shake his hand, get his autograph, even get a selfie with him; he said he felt like a ‘movie-star’. In a sense that was exactly what he was, César Vallejo’s ‘movie-star’. He was awarded the Order of Simón Bolívar by the National University of Trujillo on that occasion – a fitting recognition of his enormous contribution over the years to scholarship on Peruvian literature – but the event that sticks in my mind the most was the guided tour James took me on around various districts of Lima one afternoon during a lull in the conference; I was amazed by the way he drew out a history of the City of Kings before my eyes just by walking down some backstreets in Miraflores and Surco, commenting on the city’s architecture, the slope of the mountain ranges, the Pacific lapping on the shore; whenever I dip into his wonderful *Lima: A Cultural and Literary History*, I have the same sense of the personality of the City of Kings emerging in his words.¹⁰⁰

I persuaded James to give one final address on Vallejo at the Conference dinner to be held at Christ Church Oxford on 14 October 2022, i.e. at the fifth meeting of the Vallejo Siempre International Congress where he would receive an award for life-long dedication to the study of the life and work of César Vallejo, but, alas, it was not to be.¹⁰¹ Sadly, the UK’s most important *vallejista* passed away in the early morning of Sunday 26 September 2021. A couple of weeks earlier, while on his monthly walk in the Scottish countryside with one of his brothers, he fell and broke one of his hips. He was admitted to hospital, where his situation worsened, leading to his death. It was the day before the inauguration of the 4th Vallejo Siempre International Congress held in New York, and many of his Peruvian colleagues were visibly moved when they heard the news. They remembered the time they met him when he first travelled to Peru back in the 1960s. The words Vallejo spoke in his poem ‘A mi hermano Miguel: In memoriam’ of *Los heraldos negros* (1919) were brought to mind, and are here quoted in James’s translation:

⁹⁹ ‘Visión panorámica de la poesía de César Vallejo’, in *Vallejo 2014: Actas del Congreso Internacional Vallejo Siempre*, ed. Gladys Flores Heredia, 3 vols (Lima: Cátedra Vallejo, 2014), I, pp. 223–240.

¹⁰⁰ James Higgins, *Lima: A Cultural and Literary History* (Oxford: Signal, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Kirstine Higgins wrote to me to inform me that she had discovered my letter of invitation to James dated 15 April 2020 among his correspondence, and that she would be happy to receive the life-long award on his behalf (email, 22 August 2022), and the Centre of César Vallejo Studies at UCL along with the Instituto de Estudios Vallejanos in Trujillo have agreed to forward the award to her.

Miguel, you went and hid
 One August night, at first light;
 But instead of laughing when you disappeared, you were sad.
 And your twin heart of those extinct
 Evenings has got fed up with not finding you. And now
 Darkness is falling in the soul.
 Listen, brother, don't be too long
 In coming out, alright? Mummy might get worried.¹⁰²

Philip Swanson has, to my mind, distilled what was especially attractive about James – his academic brilliance combined with his humanity and his modesty:

You will probably, like me, have been with him in Peru on occasions, and you will have seen how venerated he was by members of the Peruvian academy and by a whole range of writers and authors. What was great about him too was how down-to-earth and modest he was. He was in this game for his love of the subject, not for status. He had no airs and graces, and was as comfortable talking to a cleaner or porter as he was to an eminent scholar or writer. He was shy and even awkward in some ways, but was terrific company and knew how to have a good time. I think he was much more admired by students, colleagues and friends than he ever realised. He also had a good life outside of academia and was not blinded by the glamour of success. He loved Scottish literature, walking and family life. And he was very fond of the ‘occasional’ dram!¹⁰³

James Higgins is survived by his wife, Kirstine, and his son, Graham, and he will be remembered around the world – and especially in Peru and the United Kingdom – as an outstanding scholar of modern Latin American literature and a true trailblazer of the analysis of César Vallejo's poetry.

Acknowledgements

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Note on the author: Stephen M. Hart is Professor of Latin American Film, Literature and Culture at University College London.

¹⁰² ‘To my brother Miguel In memoriam’, in *César Vallejo: A Selection of his Poetry*, with translations, introduction and notes by James Higgins (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987), p. 13.

¹⁰³ Email to author, 2 August 2022.

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