



# 5 Exceptional Poets from Latin America

Let's explore 5 poems written by well-known writers in Latin America. These poets have belonged to different traditions and movements throughout history, exposing the depth of the culture they belong to and the human life they reflect.

## 1. Humberto Ak'abal

Humberto Ak'abal was a Guatemalan poet, born in the region of Momostenango in 1952. His Mayan ancestry is reflected in his work and ideology. Ak'abal's work is organic and simple, including a lot of natural elements from his surroundings and his cultural beliefs. The following poem is direct and short as is his usual style, and it reveals the difficult history of colonization amongst Mayan and indigenous communities and their continuous struggles.

### ***Dos Lágrimas***

*Cuando nací*

*me pusieron dos lágrimas*

*en los ojos*

*para que pudiera ver*

*el tamaño del dolor de mi gente.*

### **Two Tears**

When I was born

they put two tears

in my eyes

so that I could see



the amount of pain in my people.

## 2. Gabriela Mistral

Gabriela Mistral was born in the town of Vicuña, Chile in 1889. She received a Nobel Prize in literature in 1945. Her poetry is dominated by the different kinds of love that crowd the human heart. The following verses reflect the influence of spirituality and religion of her upbringing and culture as well as literary influences such as Dante.

### **Versos Alexandrinos**

*¡Biblia, mi noble Biblia, panorama estupendo,  
en donde se quedaron mis ojos largamente,  
tienes sobre los Salmos las lavas más ardientes  
y en su río de fuego mi corazón enciendo!  
Sustentaste a mis gentes con tu robusto vino  
y los erguiste recios en medio de los hombres,  
y a mí me yergue de ímpetu sólo el decir tu nombre;  
porque yo de ti vengo, he quebrado al destino  
Después de ti tan solo me traspasó los huesos  
con su ancho alarido el sumo florentino*

### **Alexandrine verses**

Bible, my noble Bible, magnificent panorama,  
where my eyes lingered for a long time,  
you have in the Psalms the most burning of lavas  
and in its river of fire I lit my heart!  
You sustained my people with your strong wine



and you made them stand strong among men,  
and just saying your name gives me strength;  
because I come from you I have broken destiny  
After you, only the scream of the great Florentine  
went through my bones.

### 3. César Vallejo

César Vallejo was born in the town of Santiago Chuco, Perú in 1892. His ancestry was a mix of Chimú Indigenous culture and Spanish Catholic, which gave him a strictly religious upbringing. Vallejo was a highly educated poet and his poetry is influenced by his interest in the working classes' struggles and politics. He was exiled from Perú in the 1930's due to his political beliefs, after which he moved around Europe for a few years. The following poem is about his time living in Paris while he was being prosecuted before gaining residency.

#### ***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 no me corro-*

*tal vez 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 sogá; son testigos  
los días jueves y los huesos húmeros,  
la soledad, la lluvia, los caminos...*

### **Black Stone Lying On A White Stone**

I will die in Paris, on a rainy day,  
on some day I can already remember.  
I will die in Paris – and I don't step aside –  
perhaps on a Thursday, as today is Thursday, in autumn.  
It will be a Thursday, because today, Thursday, setting down  
these lines, I have put my upper arm bones on  
wrong, and never so much as today have I found myself  
with all the road ahead of me, alone.  
César Vallejo is dead. Everyone beat him  
although he never does anything to them;  
they beat him hard with a stick and hard also  
with a rope. These are the witnesses:  
the Thursdays, and the bones of my arms,  
the solitude, and the rain, and the roads...

## **4. Octavio Paz**



Octavio Paz was born in 1914 in Mexico City and won the Nobel Prize in 1990 a few years before his death. He was born into a prominent family that had ties with elites from different backgrounds such as politics and military. Some of his most well-known works dealt with representations of Mexican society and politics. The following poem demonstrates the influence of philosophy and existence in his work.

### ***Hermandad***

*Soy Hombre: duro poco*

*y es enorme la noche.*

*Pero miro hacia arriba:*

*Las estrellas escriben.*

*Sin entender comprendo:*

*también soy escritura*

*y en este mismo instante*

*alguien me deletrea.*

### **Brotherhood**

I am a man: little do I last

and the night is enormous.

But I look up:

the stars write.

Unknowing I understand:

I too am written,

and at this very moment

someone spells me out.



## 5. Alejandra Pizarnik

Alejandra Pizarnik was born in Argentina, 1936 to Jewish immigrants from Russia. Her work and ideology is linked to feminist movements and the most popular themes found in her poetry are love and death. She was an autobiographical poet, and the following poem demonstrates the sadness in love and death of which she often wrote.

### ***Despedida***

*Mata su luz un fuego abandonado.*

*Sube su canto un pájaro enamorado.*

*Tantas criaturas ávidas en mi silencio*

*y esta pequeña lluvia que me acompaña*

### **Farewell**

Kill your light, an abandoned fire.

A bird in love rises to his song.

So many avid creatures in my silence

and this little rain that accompanies me