

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 form 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 Chimu 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 soga; 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.

with a rope. These are the witnesses:
the Thursdays, and the bones of my arms,
the solitude, and the rain, and the roads...

César Vallejo is dead. Everyone beat him

although he never does anything to them;

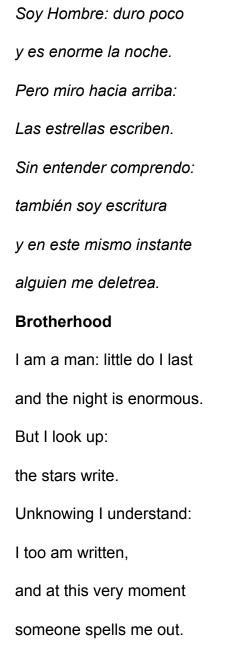
they beat him hard with a stick and hard also

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





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