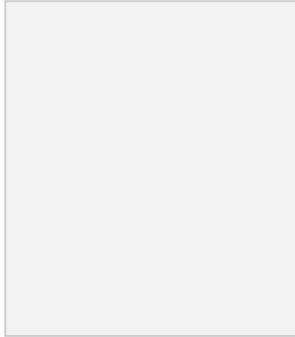


## Biography Gabriela Mistral

### Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957)



Gabriela Mistral was the first female Latin American poet to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. She received it in 1945. The Nobel citation read:

*“for her lyric poetry which, inspired by powerful emotions, has made her name a symbol of the idealistic aspirations of the entire Latin American world“*

Gabriela Mistral was the pseudonym for Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga. She was born in Vicuna, Chile in 1889.

Her early life was traumatic. She was brought up by her mother after her father left the family when she was 3 years old. However, her mother’s declining health meant Gabriela had to start working early – from the age of 16, she worked as a teachers assistant.

Aged 17, she met Romeo Ureta, with whom she fell in love with. But, more tragedy was to strike three years later, when he committed suicide. This loss devastated Gabriela and left a lasting scar throughout her life. More tragedy was to strike later when a nephew also committed suicide.

Gabriela threw herself into her career as a writer and work in education. She became a published author – including volumes of poetry and articles about education.

The poems of Gabriela Mistral included themes of Christian faith, love and sorrow. Gabriela Mistral was a lay member of the Franciscan order and this Catholic faith and belief in the afterlife, influenced her poetry and outlook on life.

Margot Arce de Vazquez says of Gabriela Mistral:

” Gabriela was to Spanish – America what Unamuno was to modern Spain. She represented the basic and typical essence of our race as Unamuno represented that which was typically Spanish. She carried within her a fusion of Basque and Indian heritage: Spanish in her rebellious, individualistic spirit; very Indian in her long, deep silences and in that priestly aura of stone idol. To this representative cultural value must be added the great value of her literary work, an incomparable document for what it reveals of her person and for its unique American accent.”

(From Gabriela Mistral: The Poet and her work, NYUP 1964)

Some of her best-known poems include: Piecitos de Niño, Balada, Todas Íbamos a ser Reinas, La Oración de la Maestra, El Ángel Guardián, Decálogo del Artista and La Flor del Aire.

As well as being a poet, Gabriela Mistral became an internationally renowned figure in literature and education. She was involved in the early cultural committees of the League of Nations and played an important role in shaping the educational systems of Mexico and Chile. She also worked as a Chilean consul in cities, such as Nice, Naples, Madrid and New York. In her work as a Chilean consul, she sometimes came into contact with fellow Latin American poet – Pablo Neruda. Mistral was an early advocate of the originality of Neruda’s poetry.

She also taught Spanish literature in the United States at Columbia University, Middlebury College, Vassar College, and at the University of Puerto Rico.

In 1945, she was the first Latin American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. She continued to receive awards during her remaining years. She died from pancreatic cancer in January 1957, aged 67.

### **Poetry of Gabriela Mistral**

And we go on and on,  
Neither sleeping nor awake,  
Towards the meeting, unaware  
That we are already there.  
That the silence is perfect,  
And that the flesh is gone.  
The call still is not heard  
Nor does the Caller reveal his face.

But perhaps this might be  
Oh, my love, the gift  
Of the eternal Face without gestures  
And of the kingdom without form!

– Gabriela Mistral

### **Song of Death**

Old Woman Census-taker,  
Death the Trickster,  
when you’re going along,  
don’t you meet my baby.

Sniffing at newborns,  
smelling for the milk,  
find salt, find cornmeal,  
don't find my milk.

Anti-Mother of the world,  
People-Collector –  
on the beaches and byways,  
don't meet that child.

The name he was baptized,  
that flower he grows with,  
forget it, Rememberer.  
Lose it, Death.

Let wind and salt and sand  
drive you crazy, mix you up  
so you can't tell  
East from West,

or mother from child,  
like fish in the sea.  
And on the day, at the hour,  
find only me.

– Gabriela Mistral

### **Gabriela's Acceptance Speech December 10, 1945**

“Today Sweden turns toward a distant Latin American country to honour it in the person of one of the many exponents of its culture. It would have pleased the cosmopolitan spirit of Alfred Nobel to extend the scope of his protectorate of civilization by including within its radius the southern hemisphere of the American continent. As a daughter of Chilean democracy, I am moved to have before me a representative of the Swedish democratic tradition, a tradition whose originality consists in perpetually renewing itself within the framework of the most valuable creations of society. The admirable work of freeing a tradition from deadwood while conserving intact the core of the old virtues, the acceptance of the present and the anticipation of the future, these are what we call Sweden, and these achievements are an honour to Europe and an inspiring example for the American continent.

The daughter of a new people, I salute the spiritual pioneers of Sweden, by whom I have been helped more than once. I recall its men of science who have enriched its national

body and mind. I remember the legion of professors and teachers who show the foreigner unquestionably exemplary schools, and I look with trusting love to those other members of the Swedish people: farmers, craftsmen, and workers.

At this moment, by an undeserved stroke of fortune, I am the direct voice of the poets of my race and the indirect voice for the noble Spanish and Portuguese tongues. Both rejoice to have been invited to this festival of Nordic life with its tradition of centuries of folklore and poetry.

May God preserve this exemplary nation, its heritage and its creations, its efforts to conserve the imponderables of the past and to cross the present with the confidence of maritime people who overcome every challenge.

My homeland, represented here today by our learned Minister Gajardo, respects and loves Sweden, and it has sent me here to accept the special honour you have awarded to it. Chile will treasure your generosity among her purest memories.

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Prior to the speech, Professor A.H.T. Theorell of the Department of Biochemistry, Nobel Institute of Medicine, addressed the Chilean poet: «To you, Gabriela Mistral, I wish to convey our admiring homage. From a distant continent, where the summer sun now shines, you have ventured the long journey to Gösta Berling's land, when the darkness of winter broods at its deepest. A worthier voice than mine has praised your poetry earlier today. May I nevertheless be permitted to say that we all share in the gladness that the Nobel Prize has this time been awarded to a poetess who combines magnificent art with the deepest and noblest aims.

Accessed 29 Sep 2023 at  
[https://www.biographyonline.net/poets/gabriela\\_mistral.html](https://www.biographyonline.net/poets/gabriela_mistral.html)